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LECTURES
IN
DIVINITY.

BY THE LATE
✓
GEORGE HILL, D. D.

PRINCIPAL OF ST. MARY'S COLLEGE, ST. ANDREWS.

EDITED FROM HIS MANUSCRIPT,
BY HIS SON,
THE REV. ALEXANDER HILL,
MINISTER OF DAILLY.

SECOND EDITION.

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VOL. I.
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PREFACE

BY THE EDITOR.

THE Author of the following Lectures was appointed Professor of Divinity in 1788, and completed the plan which he had formed for himself, in about four years. In every succeeding year, he revised with unwearied care that part of his course which he intended to read to his students ; and not a few of the Lectures appear to have been recently transcribed. He took no steps himself for publishing them as a whole ; but he is known to have had this in contemplation ; and at his death he consigned them to the Editor, in such terms as implied that the publication of them would not be in opposition to his wishes.

It will be agreeable, the Editor believes, to the wishes of that large proportion of the ministers of the church of Scotland, who went from the hall of St. Mary's College with unfeigned respect for the character and talents of the Author, to peruse those prelections which commanded the attention of their earlier years. And he is well persuaded, that there are many, who, from personal attachment to the Author, or from a knowledge of his high reputation, are

anxious to become acquainted with his sentiments, on points so important as those which his Lectures embrace.

These considerations alone, however, would not have induced the Editor to disclose his father's manuscripts to the public eye. In the conclusion of his opening address, as Professor of Divinity, the Author pledged himself by making this solemn declaration: "Under the blessing and direction of the Almighty, in whose hands I am, and to whom I must give account, no industry or research, no expense of time or of thought, shall be wanting on my part, to render my labours truly useful to the students of divinity in this college." It was under a strong impression that this pledge has been fully redeemed;—in the firm belief that the publication of his theological lectures, one of the principal fruits of the Author's active and laborious life, will do honour to his memory;—and in the anxious hope that the object, for which the Lectures were written, to teach and to defend "the truth as it is in Jesus," may be thus more largely attained, that the Editor resolved to present them to the world.

He cannot withdraw from the charge, which he has felt it both a duty and a pleasure to fulfil, without expressing the increased veneration, which an attentive perusal of the Lectures has excited in his bosom for the Author; and without offering a fervent prayer to God, that the church, of which he formed so distinguished a member, may never want men, on whom the example of his diligence and suc-

cess may freely operate, who may be equally eminent in biblical and theological learning, and may cherish his liberal, enlightened, and truly Christian views.

The Author himself divided his course into Books, and Chapters, and Sections, first when he printed the heads of his Lectures for the use of his students, and afterwards in a larger work, entitled "Theological Institutes." In the present publication the same arrangement has been adopted. This has necessarily led to some inconsiderable changes on the Lectures, as they were read from the chair. But the Editor has been scrupulous in making as few other alterations on the manuscript as possible. The introductory discourse to the students, which related to the sentiments and character essential for them to maintain, has been much abridged, as it bore in some measure upon local circumstances in the University of St. Andrews. And towards the end of this work, it will be found, by a reference to the notes, that those parts of the course have been omitted, which the Author himself had previously given to the public.

It was the wish of the Editor to subjoin a note of reference to every quotation made by the Author. But in the manuscript it frequently happened that there was nothing to lead him particularly to the passage or authority cited. In his remote situation he had not access to all the books which it was necessary to consult; and even with the assistance of his friends, he has not been uniformly successful in

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LECTURES IN DIVINITY.

BOOK I.

EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE.

THE professed design of students in divinity is to prepare for a most honourable and important office, for being workers together with God in that great and benevolent scheme, by which he is restoring the virtue and happiness of his intelligent offspring, and for holding, with credit to themselves and with advantage to the public, that station in society, by the establishment of which the wisdom of the state lends its aid to render the labours of the servants of Christ respectable and useful. Learning, prudence, and eloquence never can be so worthily employed as when they are devoted to the improvement of mankind ; and a good man will find no exertion of his talents so pleasing as that by which he endeavours to make other men such as they ought to be. We expect the breast of every student of divinity to be possessed with these views. If any person is devoid of them, if he despises the office of a minister of the gospel, if the character of his mind is such as

to derive no satisfaction from the employments of that office, or from the object towards which they are directed, he ought to turn his attention to some other pursuit. He cannot expect to attain eminence or to enjoy comfort in a station, for which he carries about with him an inward disqualification ; and there is an hypocrisy most disgraceful and most hurtful to his moral character in all the external appearances of preparing for that station.

In attempting to lead you through that course of study which is immediately connected with your profession, I begin with what is called the Deistical Controversy, that is, with a view of the Evidences of Christianity, and of the various questions which have arisen in canvassing the branches of which they are composed.

I assume, as the ground-work of every religious system, these two great doctrines, that “ God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek him.” * When I say that I assume them, I do not mean that human reason unassisted by revelation was ever able to demonstrate these doctrines in a manner satisfactory to every understanding. But I mean that these doctrines are agreeable to the natural impressions of the human mind, and that any religious system which purifies them from the manifold errors with which they have been incorporated, corresponds, in that respect, to the clear deductions of enlightened reason.

It is not my province to enter into any detail upon the proofs of these two doctrines of natural religion ; and I am afraid to engage in discussions

* Hebrews xi. 6.

which have been conducted with much erudition and metaphysical acuteness, lest I should be enticed to employ too large a portion of your time in reviewing them. Leaving you to avail yourselves of the copious sources of information which writers upon this subject afford, I will not enumerate, far less attempt to appreciate the different modes of reasoning which have been adopted in proof of the being of God, and his moral government. But, having assumed these doctrines, I think it proper to give, by way of introduction to my course, a short view of the manner in which it appears to me that they may be established as the ground-work of all religion.

When we say that there is a God, we mean that the universe is the work of an intelligent Being; that is, from the things which we behold, we infer the existence of what is not the object of our senses. To show that the inference is legitimate, we must be able to state the principles upon which it proceeds, or the steps of that process by which the mind advances from the contemplation of the objects with which it is conversant, to the conviction of the existence of their Creator. These principles are found in the constitution of the human mind, in sentiments and perceptions which are natural and ultimate, which are manifested by all men upon various occasions, and which are only followed to their proper conclusion when they conduct us to the knowledge of God. One of these sentiments and perceptions appears in the spirit of inquiry and investigation which universally prevails; another is invariably excited by the contemplation of order, beauty, and design.

A spirit of inquiry and investigation has larger

opportunities of exertion, it is better directed, and is applied to nobler objects with some than with others. But, to a certain degree, it is common to all men, and traces of it are found amongst all ranks. Now you will observe, that this spirit of inquiry is an effort to discover the cause of what we behold. And it proceeds upon this natural perception, that every new event, every thing which we see coming into existence, every alteration in any being, is an effect. Without hesitation we conclude that it has been produced, and we are solicitous to discover the cause of it. We begin our inquiries with eagerness; we pursue them as far as we have light to carry us; and we do not rest satisfied till we arrive at something which renders farther inquiries unnecessary. This persevering spirit of inquiry which is daily exerted about trifles finds the noblest subject of exertion in the continual changes which we behold upon the appearances of the heavenly bodies, upon the state of the atmosphere, upon the surface of the earth, and in those hidden regions which the progress of art leads man to explore. To every attentive and intelligent observer these continual changes present the whole universe as an effect; and, in contemplating the succession of them, he is led, as by the hand of nature, through a chain of subordinate and dependent causes to that great original cause from whom the universe derived its being, upon whose operation depend all the changes of which it is susceptible, and by whose uncontrolled agency all events are directed.

Even without forming any extensive observations upon the train of natural events, we are led by the same spirit of inquiry from considering our own

species, to the knowledge of our Creator. Every man knows that he had a beginning, and that he derived his being from a succession of creatures like himself. However far back he supposes this succession to be carried, it does not afford a satisfying account of the cause of his existence. By the same principle which directs him in every other research, he is still led to seek for some original Being, who has been produced by none, and is himself the Father of all. As every man knows that he came into existence, so he has the strongest reason to believe that the whole race to which he belongs had a beginning. A tradition has in all ages been preserved of the origin of the human race. Many nations have boasted of antiquity. None have pretended to eternity. All that their records contain beyond a certain period is fabulous or doubtful. In looking back upon the history of mankind, we find them increasing in numbers, acquiring a taste for the ornaments of life, and improving in the liberal arts and sciences ; so that unless we adopt without proof and against all probability the supposition of successive deluges which drown in oblivion all the attainments of civilized nations, and spare only a few savage inhabitants to propagate the race, we find in the state of mankind all the marks of novelty which it must have borne, had it begun to be some few thousand years ago. But if the human race had a beginning, we unavoidably regard it as an effect of which we require some original cause ; and to the same cause from which it derived existence we must also trace the qualities by which the race is distinguished. The Being who gave it existence must be capable of imparting to it these qualities, that is, must possess

them in a much higher degree. “ He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?” * Thus, from the intelligence of men, we necessarily infer that of their Creator; while the number of intelligent beings with whom we converse cannot fail to give us the noblest idea of that original primary intelligence from which theirs is derived.

While the spirit of inquiry which is natural to man thus leads us from the consciousness of our own existence to acknowledge the existence of one supreme intelligent Being, the Father of Spirits, we are conducted to the same conclusion by that other natural perception which I said is invariably excited by the contemplation of order, beauty, and design.

The grandeur and beauty of external objects do not seem to affect the other animals. But they afford a certain degree of pleasure to all men; and in many persons a taste for them is so far cultivated that the pleasures of imagination constitute a large source of refined enjoyment. When grandeur and beauty are conjoined as they seldom fail to be with utility, they do not merely afford us pleasure. We not only perceive the objects which we behold, to be grand and beautiful and useful; but we perceive them to be effects produced by a designing cause. In viewing a complicated machine, it is the design which strikes us. In admiring the object, we admire the mind that formed it. Without hesitation we conclude that it had a former; and, although ig-

* Psal. xciv. 9, 10.

norant of every other circumstance respecting him, we know this much, that he is possessed of intelligence, our idea of which rises in proportion to the design discovered in the construction of the machine. By this principle, which is prior to all reasoning, and of which we can give no other account than that it is part of the constitution of the human mind, we are raised from the admiration of natural objects to a knowledge of the existence, and a sense of the perfections of Him who made them.

When we contemplate the works of nature, distinguished from those of art by their superior elegance, splendour, and utility ; when we behold the sun, the moon, and the stars, performing their offices with the most perfect regularity, and although removed at an immense distance from us, contributing in a high degree to our preservation and comfort ; when we view this earth fitted as a convenient habitation for man, adorned with numberless beauties, and provided not only with a supply of our wants, but with every thing that can minister to our pleasure and entertainment ; when, extending our observation to the various animals that inhabit this globe, we find that every creature has its proper food, its proper habitation, its proper happiness ; that the meanest insect as well as the noblest animal has the several parts of its body, the senses bestowed upon it, and the degree of perfection in which it possesses them, adapted with the nicest proportion to its preservation and to the manner of life which by natural instinct it is led to pursue ; when we thus discover within our own sphere, numberless traces of kind and wise design, and when we learn both by experience and by observation that

the works of nature, the more they are investigated and known, appear the more clearly to be parts of one great consistent whole, we are necessarily led by the constitution of our mind to believe the being of a God. Our faith does not stand in the obscure reasonings of philosophers. We but open our eyes, and discerning, wheresoever we turn them, the traces of a wise Creator, we see and acknowledge his hand. The most superficial view is sufficient to impress our minds with a sense of his existence. The closest scrutiny, by enlarging our acquaintance with the innumerable final causes that are found in the works of God, strengthens this impression, and confirms our first conclusions. The more that we know of these works, we are the more sensible that in nature there is not only an exertion of power, but an adjustment of means to an end, which is what we call wisdom ; and an adjustment of means to the end of distributing happiness to all the creatures, which is the highest conception that we can form of goodness.

A foundation so deeply laid in the constitution of the human mind for the belief of a Deity has produced an acknowledgment of his being, almost universal. The idea of God, found amongst all nations civilized in the smallest degree, is such that by the slightest use of our faculties we must acquire it. And accordingly, the few nations who are said to have no notion of God are in a state so barbarous that they seem to have lost the perceptions and sentiments of men.

The Atheist allows it to be necessary that something should have existed of itself from eternity. But he is accustomed to maintain that matter in mo-

tion is sufficient to account for all those appearances from which we infer the being of God. The absurdities of this hypothesis have been ably exposed. He supposes that matter is self-existent, although it has marks of dependence and imperfection inconsistent with that attribute. He supposes that matter has from eternity been in motion, that is, that motion is an essential quality of matter, although we cannot conceive of motion as any other than an accidental property of matter, impressed by some cause, and determined in its direction by foreign impulses. He supposes that all the appearances of uniformity and design which surround him can proceed from irregular undirected movements. And he supposes lastly, that although there is not a plant which does not spring from its seed, nor an insect which is not propagated by its kind, yet matter in motion can produce life and intelligence, properties repugnant in the highest degree to all the known properties of matter.

I do not say that it is possible by reasoning to demonstrate that these suppositions are false ; and I do not know that it is wise to make the attempt. The belief of the being of God rests upon a sure foundation, upon the foundation on which He himself has rested it, if all the suppositions by which some men have tried to set it aside contradict the natural perceptions of the human mind. These are the language in which God speaks to his creatures, a language which is heard through all the earth ; and the words of which are understood to the end of the world. By listening to that language, we learn from the various yet uniform phenomena of nature, that there is a wise Creator : we are taught by the imperfec-

tion and dependence of the soul, that it owes its being to some original cause; and in its extensive faculties, its liberty, and power of self-motion, we discern that cause to be essentially different from matter. The voice of nature thus proclaims to the children of men the existence of one supreme intelligent Being, and calls them with reverence to adore the Father of their spirits.

The other great doctrine which I assume as the ground-work of every religious system, is thus expressed by the Apostle to the Hebrews: "God is a rewarder of them that seek Him;" in other words, the government of God is a moral government.

We are here confined to an inconsiderable spot in the creation, and we are permitted to behold but a small part of the operations of Providence. It becomes us therefore to proceed in our inquiries concerning the Divine Government with much humility: but it does not become us to desist. The character and the laws of that government under which we acknowledge that we live, are matters to us of the last importance; and it is our duty thankfully to avail ourselves of the light which we enjoy. The constitution of human nature and the state of the world are the only two subjects within the sphere of our observations, from which unassisted reason can discover the character of the divine government.

When we attend to the constitution of human nature, the three following particulars occur as traces of a moral government.

1. The distribution of pleasure and pain in the mind of man is a moral distribution. Those affections and that conduct which we denominate virtuous are attended with immediate pleasure; the op-

posite affections and conduct with immediate pain. The man who acts under the influence of benevolence, gratitude, a regard to justice and truth, is in a state of enjoyment. The heart which is actuated by resentment or malice is a stranger to joy. Here is a striking fact of a very general kind furnishing very numerous specimens of a moral government.

2. There is a faculty in the human mind which approves of virtue, and condemns vice. It is not enough to say that righteousness is prudent because it is attended with pleasure ; that wickedness is foolish because it is attended with pain. Conscience, in judging of them, pronounces the one to be right, and the other to be wrong. The righteous, supported by that most delightful of all sentiments, the sense that he is doing his duty, proceeds with self-approbation, and reflects upon his conduct with complacence ; the wicked not only is distracted by the conflict of various wretched passions, but acts under the perpetual conviction that he is doing what he ought not to do. The hurry of business or the tumult of passion may, for a season, so far drown the voice of conscience, as to leave him at liberty to accomplish his purpose. But when his mind is cool, he perceives that in following blindly the impulse of appetite he has acted beneath the dignity of his reasonable nature ; the indulgence of malevolent affections is punished by the sentiment of remorse ; and he despises himself for every act of baseness.

3. Conscience, anticipating the future consequences of human actions, forebodes that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. The righteous, although naturally modest and unassuming, not only enjoys present serenity, but looks forward with

good hope. The prospect of future ease lightens every burden, and the view of distant scenes of happiness and joy holds up his head in the time of adversity. But every crime is accompanied with a sense of deserved punishment. To the man who has disregarded the admonitions of conscience, she soon begins to utter her dreadful presages ; she lays open to his view the dismal scenes which lie beyond every unlawful pursuit ; and sometimes awaking with increased fury, she produces horrors that constitute a degree of wretchedness, in comparison of which all the sufferings of life do not deserve to be mentioned.

The constitution of human nature being the work of God, the three particulars which have been mentioned as parts of that constitution are parts of his government. The pleasure which accompanies one set of affections and the pain which accompanies the opposite afford an instance in the government of God of virtue being rewarded, and vice being punished :—the faculty which passes sentence upon human actions is a declaration from the Author of our nature of that conduct which is agreeable to Him, because it is a rule directing his creatures to pursue a certain conduct :—and the presentiment of the future consequences of our behaviour is a declaration from the Author of our nature of the manner in which his government is to proceed with regard to us. The hopes and fears natural to the human mind are the language in which God foretells to man the events in which he is deeply interested. To suppose that the Almighty engages his creatures in a certain course of action by delusive hopes and fears, is at once absurd and impious ; and if we think worthily of the Supreme Being, we cannot entertain a doubt that

He, who by the constitution of human nature has declared his love of virtue and his hatred of vice, will at length appear the righteous Governor of the universe.

I mentioned the state of the world as another subject within the sphere of our observation, from which unassisted reason may discover the character of the government of God. And here also we may mark three traces of a moral government.

1. It occurs, in the first place, to consider the world as the situation in which creatures, having the constitution which has been described, are placed. Acting in the presence of men, that is, of creatures constituted as we ourselves are, and feeling a connection with them in all the occupations of life, we experience, in the sentiments of those around us, a farther reward and punishment than that which arises from the sense of our own minds. The faculty which passes sentence upon a man's own actions, when carried forth to the actions of others becomes a principle of esteem or contempt. The sense of good or ill desert becomes, upon the review of the conduct of others, applause or indignation. When it referred to a man's own conduct, it pointed only at what was future. When it refers to the conduct of others it becomes an active principle, and proceeds in some measure to execute the rules which it pronounces to be just.

Hence the righteous is rewarded by the sentiments of his fellow-creatures. He experiences the gratitude of some, the friendship, at least the good-will of all. The wicked, on the other hand, is a stranger to esteem, and confidence, and love. His vices expose him to censure ; his deceit renders him an ob-

ject of distrust ; his malice creates him enemies ; according to the kind and the degree of his demerit, contempt or hatred or indignation is felt by every one who knows his character ; and even when these sentiments do not lead others to do him harm, they weaken or extinguish the emotions of sympathy ; so that his neighbours do not rejoice in his prosperity, and hardly weep over his misfortunes.

Thus does God employ the general sense of mankind to encourage and reward the righteous, to correct and punish the wicked ; and thus has he constituted men in some sort the keepers of their brethren, the guardians of one another's virtue. The natural unperverted sentiments of the human mind with regard to character and conduct are upon the side of virtue and against vice ; and the course of the world, turning in a great measure upon these sentiments, indicates a moral government.

2. A second trace in the state of the world, of the moral government of God, is the civil government by which society subsists.

Those who are employed in the administration of civil government are not supposed to act immediately from sentiment. It is expected that without regard to their own private emotions they shall in every case proceed according to certain known and established laws. But these laws, so far as they go, are in general consonant to the sentiments of the human mind, and, like them, are favourable to the cause of virtue. The happiness, the existence of human government depends upon the protection and encouragement which it affords to virtue, and the punishment which it inflicts upon vice. The government of men, therefore, in its best and happiest form

is a moral government ; and being a part, an instrument of the government of God, it serves to intimate to us the rule according to which his Providence operates through the general system.

3. Setting aside all consideration of the opinions of the instrumentality of man, there appear in the world evident traces of the moral government of God. Many of the consequences of men's behaviour happen without the intervention of any agent. Of this kind are the effects which their way of life has upon their health, and much of its influence upon their fortune and situation. Effects of the same nature extend to communities of men. They derive strength and stability from the truth, moderation, temperance, and public spirit of the members ; whereas idleness, luxury, and turbulence, while they ruin the private fortunes of many individuals, are hurtful to the community ; and the general depravity of the members is the disease and weakness of the state.

These effects do not arise from any civil institution. They are not a part of the political regulations which are made with different degrees of wisdom in different states ; but they may be observed in all countries. They are part of what we commonly call the course of nature ; that is, they are rewards and punishments ordained by the Lord of nature, not affected by the caprice of his subjects, and flowing immediately from the conduct of men. There arise indeed, from the present situation of human affairs, many obstructions to the full operation of these rewards and punishments. Yet the degree in which they actually take place is sufficient to ascertain the character of the government of God. In those cases where we are able to trace the causes which prevent

the exact distribution of good and evil, we perceive that the very hindrances are wisely adapted to a present state. Even where we do not discern the reasons of their existence, we clearly perceive that these hindrances are accidental ; that virtue, benign and salutary in its influences, tends to produce happiness, pure and unmingled ; that vice, in its nature mischievous tends to confusion and misery ; and we cannot avoid considering these tendencies as the voice of Him, who hath established the order of nature, declaring to those who observe and understand them, the future condition of the righteous and the wicked.

And thus in the world, we behold upon every hand of us openings of a kingdom of righteousness corresponding to what we formerly traced in the constitution of human nature. By that constitution, while reward is provided for virtue and punishment for vice, there arise in our breasts the forebodings of a higher reward and a higher punishment. So in the world, while there are manifold instances of a righteous distribution of good and evil, there is a tendency towards the completion of a scheme which is here but begun.

This view of the government of God, which we have collected from the constitution of human nature and the state of the world, is brought to light by the religion of Jesus Christ. The language of God in his works leads us to his word in the Gospel. All our disquisitions concerning the nature of his government only prepare us for receiving those gracious discoveries, which, confirming every conclusion of right reason, resolving every doubt, and enlarging the imperfect views which belong to this the beginning of our existence, bring us perfect assurance, that,

in the course of the Divine government, unlimited in extent, in duration, and in power, every hindrance shall be removed, the natural consequences of action shall be allowed to operate, virtue shall be happy, and vice shall be miserable.

Abernethy on the Attributes.

Cudworth's Intellectual System ; a magazine of learning, where all the different schemes of Atheism are combated with profound erudition and close argument.

Boyle's Lectures ; a collection of the ablest defences of the great truths of religion that are to be found in any language. Having been composed in a long succession of years by men of different talents and pursuits, they furnish an abundant specimen of all the variety of argument that has ever been adduced upon the subjects of which they treat.

Butler's Analogy, the first chapters of which should be particularly studied in relation to the subjects of this discourse.

Essays on Morality and Natural Religion, by Henry Home, Lord Kaimes.

Paley's Natural Theology, the last and perhaps the most elaborate work of this author. He had here his pioneers as well as his forerunners. But his inimitable skill in arranging and condensing his matter, his peculiar turn for what may be called "animal mechanics," the aptness and the wit of his illustrations, and occasionally the warmth and the solemnity of his devotion, which, by a happy and becoming process, was rendered more animated as he drew nearer to the close of life, stamp on this work a character more valuable than originality.

CHAP. I.

COLLATERAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY FROM
HISTORY.

THE ground-work which I suppose to be laid in an inquiry into the truth of the Christian religion, is a belief of the two great doctrines of natural religion, that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek him. You consider man as led by the principles of his nature to believe that the universe is the work of an intelligent Being, although wandering very much in his apprehensions of that Being: you consider him as feeling that the government of the Creator of the world is a righteous government, although conscious that he often transgresses the law of his Maker, and very uncertain as to the method in which the sanctions of that law are to operate with regard to him: and you propose to examine whether to man, in these circumstances, there was given an extraordinary revelation by the preaching of the Son of God, or whether Jesus Christ and his apostles were men who spoke and wrote according to their own measure of knowledge, and who, when they called themselves the messengers of God, assumed a character which did not belong to them. It is manifest at first sight, that such a revelation is extremely desirable to man; and a closer investigation of the subject may show it to be desirable in such a degree, so necessary to the comfort and improvement of man,

as to create a presumption in favour of the proofs that the Father of the human race has been pleased to grant it. But the necessity of revelation is a subject upon which, in my opinion, it is better not to enter at the outset ; because, if the proofs of the truth of Christianity be defective, the presumption arising from this necessity will not be sufficient to help them out ; and if they be clear and conclusive, the necessity of revelation will be more manifest after you proceed to examine its nature and its effects.

The truth of Christianity turns upon a question of fact ; which, like every other question of the same kind, ought to be judged calmly and impartially—not by the wishes which it may be natural to form upon the subject, but by the evidence which is adduced in support of the fact. We allow the great body of the people to retain all the early prejudices which they happily acquire on the side of Christianity. We allow its full weight to every consideration which is level to their capacity, and which corresponds to their habits ; because, what we wish to impress upon them is a practical belief of the truth of religion : and this practical belief may be sufficient to direct their conduct and to establish their hope, although it be not grounded upon critical inquiries and logical deductions. But it is expected that the teachers of religion should be able to defend the citadel in which they are placed, against the attack of every enemy, and that they should be acquainted with the quarters which are most likely to be attacked, with the nature of the blow that is to be aimed, and the most successful method of warding it off. With them, therefore, belief ought to be not merely the result of early habit, but a convic-

tion founded upon a close examination of evidence ; and in this, as in every other inquiry, they ought to take the fair and safe method of arriving at the truth, by bringing to the search after it, a mind unembarrassed with any prepossession.

A person who, in this state of mind, begins to examine the question of fact upon which the deistical controversy turns, will be struck with that support which the truth of Christianity receives from the whole train of history for more than 1700 years. The impartial historians of those times, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny, in passages * which have been often quoted and commented upon, and the exact amount of which every student of divinity ought to know, concur with Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, the learned, inveterate, and inquisitive adversaries of the Christian faith, in establishing beyond the possibility of doubt the following leading facts ;—that Jesus Christ, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death ; that this man during his life founded, and his followers after his death supported a sect, upon the reputation of performing miracles ; and that this sect spread quickly, and became very numerous in different parts of the Roman empire. A succession of Christian writers is extant, some of whom lived near enough the event to be witnesses of it, and all of whom published books, which must have appeared absurd to their contemporaries, if the facts upon which these books proceeded had then been known to be false. A chain of tradition can be shown by which the principal facts were transmitted in the Christian church. The existence of

* Sueton. Claud. cap. 25. Sueton. Nero. cap. 16. Tacit. Ann. l. xv. 44. Plin. l. x. ep. 97.

our religion can be traced back to the time and place to which the beginning of it is referred ; and since that time, by the institution of a Gospel ministry, by the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and by the observance of the Lord's day, there have continued, in many parts of the world, standing memorials of the preaching, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

I begin with mentioning these things, because every literary man will perceive the advantage of taking possession of this strong ground. By placing his foot here he is furnished with a kind of extrinsical evidence, the force of which none will deny, which cannot be said to create any unreasonable prepossession, and yet which prepares the mind for the less remote proofs of a Divine revelation.

Grotius de Veritate Rel. Chris.

Macknight on the Truth of the Gospel History.

Addison's Evidences.

Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History.

CHAP. II.

AUTHENTICITY AND GENUINENESS OF THE BOOKS
OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THE whole of that revelation which is peculiar to Christians is contained in the books of the New Testament; and, therefore, it appears to me, that before we begin to judge of the divine mission or inspiration of the persons to whom these books are ascribed, we ought to satisfy ourselves that the books themselves are authentic and genuine. For even although the apostles of Jesus did really receive a commission from the Son of God, yet if the books which bear their names were not written by them, or if they have been corrupted as to their substance and import since they were written, that is, if the books are not both authentic and genuine, we may be very much misled by trusting to them notwithstanding the divine mission of their supposed authors. I oppose the word authentic to supposititious; the word genuine to vitiated; I call a book authentic which was truly the work of the person whose name it bears; I call a book genuine which remains in all material points the same as when it proceeded from the author. Upon these two points, the authenticity and genuineness of the books of the New Testament, I am at present to fix your attention. Both the subjects open a wide field, and have received much discussion. All that I can do is, to mark to you the leading circumstances which have been

discussed, and with regard to which it becomes you to inform and satisfy your minds.

1. The canon of the New Testament is the collection of books written by apostles, or by persons under their direction, and received by Christians as of divine authority. This canon was not formed by any General Council, who claimed a power of deciding in this matter for the Christian Church; but it continued to grow during all the age of the apostles, and it received frequent accessions, as the different books came to be generally recognised. It was many years after the ascension of Jesus before any of the books of the New Testament were written. The apostles were at first entirely occupied with the labours and perils which they encountered in executing their commission to preach the Gospel to all nations. They found neither leisure nor occasion to write, till Christian societies were formed; and all their writings were suggested by particular circumstances which occurred in the progress of Christianity. Some of the Epistles to the Churches were the earliest of their writings. Every Epistle was received upon unquestionable evidence by the Church to which it was sent, and in whose keeping the original manuscript remained. Copies were circulated first among the neighbouring churches, and went from them to Christian societies at a greater distance, till, by degrees, the whole Christian world, considering the superscription of the Epistle, and the manner in which it came to them, as a token of its authenticity, and relying upon the original, which they knew where to find, gave entire credit to its being the work of him whose name it bore. This is the history of the thirteen Epistles which bear the name of

the apostle Paul, and of the First Epistle of Peter. Some of the other Epistles, which had not the same particular superscription, were not so easily authenticated to the whole Church, and were, upon that account, longer of being admitted into the canon.

The Gospels were written by different persons, for different purposes ; and those Christian societies upon whose account they were originally composed, communicated them to others. The book of Acts went along with the Gospel of Luke, as a second part composed by the same author. The four Gospels, the book of Acts, and the fourteen epistles which I mentioned, very early after their publication, were known and received by the followers of Jesus in every part of the world. References are made to them by the first Christian writers ; and they have been handed down, by an uninterrupted tradition, from the days in which they appeared, to our time. Polycarp was the disciple of the Apostle John ; Irenæus was the disciple of Polycarp ; and of the works of Irenæus a great part is extant, in which he quotes most of the books of the New Testament, and mentions the number of the Gospels, and the names of many of the Epistles. Origen in the third century, Eusebius and Jerome in the fourth, give us, in their voluminous works, catalogues of the books of the New Testament which coincide with ours, relate fully the history of the authors of the several books, with the occasion upon which they wrote, and make large quotations from them. In the course of the first four centuries, the greater part of the New Testament was transcribed in the writings of the Christians, and many particular passages were quoted and referred to by Cel-

sus and Julian, in their attacks upon Christianity. From the beginning of the Church, throughout the whole Christian world, the books of the New Testament were publicly read and explained to the people in their assemblies for divine worship; and they were continually appealed to by Christian writers as the standard of faith, and the supreme judge in controversy. The Christian world was very far from being prone to receive every book which claimed inspiration. Although many were circulated under respectable names, none were ever admitted by the whole Church, or quoted by Christian writers as of divine authority, except those which we now receive. And it was very long before some of them were universally acknowledged. When you come to examine the subject particularly, you will find that we stand upon ground which we are fully able to defend, when we admit the Epistle to the Hebrews, the smaller Epistles, and the book of Revelation, as of equal authority with any other part of the New Testament. At the same time, the hesitation which, for several ages, was entertained in some places of the Christian world with regard to these books, is satisfying to a candid mind, because this hesitation is of itself a strong presumption, that the universal and cordial reception which was given to all the other books of the New Testament, proceeded upon clear incontestable evidence of their authenticity.

If, then, we readily receive, upon the authority of tradition, the History of Thucydides, the Orations of Cicero, the Dialogues of Plato, as really the composition of these immortal authors, we have much more reason to give credit to the explicit testimony which the judgment of contemporaries, and the ac-

knowledgment of succeeding ages, have borne to the writers of the New Testament. There is not any ancient book with regard to which the external evidence of authenticity is so full and so various: and this variety of external evidence is confirmed to every person who is capable of judging, by the most striking internal marks of authenticity,—by numberless instances of agreement with the history of those times, which are most satisfying when they appear to be most trivial, because they form altogether a continued coincidence in points where it could not well have been studied; a coincidence which, the more that any one is versant in the manners, the geography, and the constitution of ancient times, will bring the more entire conviction to his mind, that these books must have been written by persons living in the very country, and at the very period to which we refer those who are accounted the authors of them. Undesigned coincidences between the Acts and the Epistles are pointed out with admirable taste and judgment in Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, which is perhaps the most cogent and convincing specimen of moral argumentation in the world; and in the first volume of his *Evidences of Christianity*,—which are professedly a compilation, but so condensed and compacted, so illuminated and enforced, that it is impossible not to admire the matchless powers of the compiler's genius in turning the patient drudgery of Lardner to such account,—the authenticity of the Gospels and Acts is established.

2. Having ascertained to your own satisfaction the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, you will next proceed to inquire whether they are genuine, that is, uncorrupted. For even although they

proceeded at first from the apostles or evangelists whose names they bear, they may have been so altered since that time as to convey to us very false information with regard to their original contents. It does not become you to rest in the presumption that the providence of God, if it gave a revelation, would certainly guard so precious a gift, and transmit entire through all ages “the faith once delivered to the saints.” * The analogy of nature does not support this presumption; for the best blessings of heaven are abused by the vices or the negligence of those upon whom they are bestowed; and succeeding generations often suffer in their domestic, political, and religious interests, by abuses of which their predecessors were guilty. It becomes a divine to know, that the manuscripts of the books of the New Testament, which were originally deposited with the Christian societies, no longer exist; that there have been the same ignorance, haste, and inaccuracy in transcribing the Gospels and Epistles, as in transcribing all other books; and that the various readings arising from these or other sources were very early observed. Origen speaks of them in the third century. They multiplied exceedingly, as was to be expected from the nature of the thing, after his time, when the copies of the original MSS. became more numerous and more widely diffused; so that Mill, in his splendid and valuable edition of the Greek Testament, has numbered 30,000 various readings.

This has been a subject of much declamation and triumph to the enemies of our Christian faith. Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Collins, Toland, Tindal, and

* Jude v. 3.

many other deistical writers in the beginning of the last century, boasted that Christians are not in possession of a sure standard ; and they built upon the supposed corruption of the Greek text, an argument for the superiority of the light of nature above that uncertain instruction which varies continually as it passes through the hands of men. A scholar must be aware of this difficulty, and prepared to meet it.

When you come to estimate the amount of the 30,000 various readings, you will find that almost all of them are trifling changes upon letters and syllables, and that there is hardly one instance in which they affect the great doctrines of our religion. It will give you much satisfaction to observe, that the different sects into which the Christian church was early divided, watched one another; that any great alteration of a book which, soon after its being published, had been sent over the whole world, was impossible ; that even those who corrupted Christianity have preserved the Scriptures so entire, as to transmit a full refutation of their own errors ; and that from the most vitiated copies the one faith and hope of Christians may be learned. Still, however, it is desirable that these various readings should be corrected, and it is proper that you should have a general acquaintance with the sources from which the correction of them is to be derived. These sources are four. 1. The MSS. of the New Testament which abound in Germany, France, Italy, England, and other countries of Europe. I mean MSS. written long before printing was in use, some of which, particularly Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus, are referred to one or other of the three first centuries of the Christian era. 2. The ancient versions of

the New Testament, which having been made in early times from copies much nearer the original MSS. than any that we have, may be considered as in some degree vouchers of the contents of those MSS. The most respectable of the ancient versions is the old Italic, which, we have reason to believe, was made in the first century for the benefit of those Christians in the Roman empire who understood the Latin better than any other language. It has, indeed, undergone many alterations; but so far as it can be recovered in its most ancient form, it is the surest guide, in doubtful places, to that which was the original reading. 3. A third source of correction is found in the numberless quotations from the New Testament with which the works of the Christian fathers and other early writers abound. Had they always copied exactly from books lying before them, the extent of their quotations would have rendered them as certain guides to the genuine reading, as they are unquestionable witnesses of the authenticity. But it cannot be denied, that as the books of the New Testament were perfectly familiar to them, they have often quoted from memory, and that being more careful to give the sense than the words, they differ from one another in some trivial respects, when quoting the same passage, so that their quotations cannot be applied indiscriminately to ascertain the original. 4. The last source of correction is sound chastised criticism, which, joining to the sagacious use of the most ancient MSS., versions, and quotations, cautious but skilful conjecture, determines which of the various readings is to be preferred, upon principles so clearly established, and so accurately applied, as to leave no hesitation in the mind of any

scholar. The canons of scripture criticism have been investigated and digested by many learned men. You will find collections of them in the Prolegomena to the larger editions of the Greek Testament. They are frequently applied by the later commentators, and they are the introduction to a kind of learning which, although it is apt, when prosecuted too far, to lead to what is minute and frivolous, yet is in many respects so essential, that it does not become any one who professes to interpret the Scriptures to others to be entirely a stranger to it.

Superficial reasoners may think it strange that so much discussion should be necessary to ascertain the true reading of the oracles of God ; and in their haste they may pronounce, that it would have been more becoming the great purpose for which these oracles were given, more kind, and more useful to man, that the originals should have been saved from destruction ; and that, if the great extent of the Christian society rendered it impossible for every one to have access to them, the all-ruling providence of God should have preserved every copy that was taken from every kind of vitiation. They who thus judge, forget that there is no part of the works of creation, of the ways of Providence, or of the dispensation of grace, in which the Almighty has done precisely that which we would have dictated to him, had he admitted us to be his counsellors, although we are generally able, by considering what he has done, to discover that his plan is more perfect, and more universally useful, than that which our narrow views might have suggested as best. They forget the extent of the miracle which they ask, when they demand, that all who ever were employed in copy-

ing the New Testament should at all times have been effectually guarded by the Spirit of God from negligence, and their works kept safe from the injuries of time. And they forget, in the last place, that the very circumstance to which they object has, in the wisdom of God, been highly favourable to the cause of truth. The infidel has enjoyed his triumph, and has exposed his ignorance. Men of erudition have been encouraged to apply their talents to a subject which opens so large a field for the exercise of them. Their research and their discoveries have demonstrated the futility of the objection, and have shown that the great body of the people in every country, who are incapable of such research, may safely rest in the Scriptures as they are; and that the most scrupulous critics, by the inexhaustible sources of correction which lie open to them, may attain nearer to an absolute certainty with regard to the true reading of the books of the New Testament, than of any other ancient book in any language. If they require more, their demand is unreasonable; for the religion of Jesus does not profess to satisfy the careless, or to overpower the obstinate, but rests its pretensions upon evidence sufficient to bring conviction to those who with honest hearts inquire after the truth, and are willing to exercise their reason in attempting to discover it.

Griesbach, professor at Jena, in Saxony, published in 1796 the first volume of his second edition of the Greek Testament, containing the four Gospels; and in 1806, the second volume, containing the other books of the New Testament. He availed himself of the materials which sacred criticism had been collecting from the time of the publication of Mill's edition. And, adverting to all the manuscript quotations and versions

which the research of a number of theological writers, in different parts of the world, had brought into view, he went farther than the former editors of the New Testament had done. They adhered to what is called the *textus receptus*, which had been established in the Elzevir edition of the Greek Testament in 1624, which is very much the same with that of the editions of Beza and Erasmus, and which is now in daily use. They only collected various readings from manuscripts, versions, and quotations, introduced them in a preface or notes, and explained in large and learned prolegomena, the degree of credit that was due to them ; thus furnishing materials for a more correct edition of the Greek Testament, and unfolding the principles upon which these materials ought to be applied. But Griesbach proceeded himself to apply the materials, by introducing emendations into the text. This he is said by Dr. Marsh, late Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and now Bishop of Peterbro', to have done with unremitting diligence, with extreme caution, and with scrupulous integrity. His emendations never rest merely upon conjecture, but always upon authority which appeared to him decisive. They are printed in a smaller character than the rest of the text, or in some clear way distinguished from the received text ; and when he was in any doubt, they are not introduced, but remain in the notes or margin. I have great satisfaction in saying, that in as far as I have examined Griesbach's New Testament, it does not appear to differ in any material respect from the received text ; so that all the industry and erudition of this laborious and accurate editor serve to establish this most comfortable doctrine, that the books of the New Testament are genuine. Dr. Marsh says, that Griesbach's edition is so correct, and the prolegomena, or critical apparatus annexed to it, so full and learned, that there will be no occasion for a different edition of the Greek Testament during the life of the youngest of us. I quote Dr. Marsh, because in that portion of his lectures which has been published, he gives the most minute and ample information concerning all the editions of the Greek Testament. He mentions repeatedly, with due honour, Dr. Gerard's Institutes of Biblical Criticism, to which I refer you.

Marsh's Lectures, and his translations of Michaelis's Introductions.

Macknight's Preliminary Discourses in his Commentary on the Epistles.

Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History, and Supplement to it.

Leland.

Jortin.

Hartley in vol. 5th of Watson's Theological Tracts.

Prettyman's Institutes.

Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*, and Evidences of Christianity.

CHAP. III.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

THE leading characteristic assertion in the books of the New Testament is, that they contain a divine revelation. Jesus said, "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me;"* and when he gave his apostles a commission to preach his gospel, he used these words, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you."† "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth him that sent me."‡ This is the highest claim which any mortal can advance. It holds forth the man who makes it under the most dignified character; and, if it be well founded, it involves consequences the most interesting to those who hear him. Such a claim is not to be carelessly admitted. The grounds upon which it rests ought to be closely scrutinized; and reason cannot have a more important or honourable office than in trying its pretensions by a fair standard.

As every circumstance respecting those who advanced such a claim merits attention, the first thing which presents itself to a rational inquirer, is the manner in which the claim is made, and the state of mind which those who make it discover in their conduct, in the general style of their writings, or in par-

* John vii. 16.

† John xx. 21.

‡ Luke x. 16.

ticular expressions. Now, if you set yourselves to collect all the characters of enthusiasm, either from the writings of those profound moralists who have analysed and discriminated the various features of the human mind, or from the behaviour of those who, in different ages, have mistaken the fancies of a distempered brain for the inspiration of heaven, you will find the most marked opposition between these characters and the appearance which the books of the New Testament present. Instead of the general, indistinct, inconsistent ravings of enthusiasm, you find in these writings discourses full of sound sense and manly eloquence, connected reasonings, apposite illustrations, a multitude of particular facts, a continual reference to common life, and the same useful instructive views preserved throughout. Instead of the gloom of enthusiasm, you find a spirit of cheerfulness, a disposition to associate, an accommodation to prejudices and opinions. Instead of credulity and vehement passion, you observe in the writers of these books a slowness of heart to believe, a hesitation in the midst of evidence, perfect possession of their faculties, with calm sedate manners. Instead of the self-conceit, the turgid insolent tone of enthusiasm, you find in them a reserve, a modesty, a simplicity of expression, a disparagement of their own peculiar gifts, and a constant endeavour to magnify, in the eyes of their followers, those virtues in which they themselves did not pretend to have any pre-eminence. The claim which they advance sits so easy and natural upon them, that the most critical eye cannot discern any trace of that kind of delusion which has often been exposed to public view ; and they are so unlike any enthusiasts whom the world

ever saw, that, as far as outward appearances are to be trusted, they “ speak the words of truth and soberness.” *

But you will not trust to appearances. It becomes you to examine the words which they speak, and you are in possession of a standard by which these words should be tried, and without a conformity to which they cannot be received as divine. Reason and conscience are the primary revelation which God made to man. We know assuredly that they came from the Author of nature, and our apprehensions of his perfections must indeed be very low, if we can suppose it possible that they should be contradicted by a subsequent revelation. If any system, therefore, which pretends to come from God, contain palpable absurdities, or if it enjoin actions repugnant to the moral feelings of our nature, it never can approve itself to our understandings. It is unnecessary to examine the evidences of its being divine, because no evidence can be so strong as our perception of the falsehood of that which is absurd, and of the inconsistency between the will of God and that which is immoral. When I say that a divine revelation cannot contain a palpable absurdity, I am far from meaning, that every thing contained in it must be plain and familiar, such as reason is already versant with. The revelation, in that case, would be unnecessary. Neither do I mean that every thing contained in it, although new, must be such as we are able fully to comprehend ; for many insuperable difficulties occur in the study of nature. We have daily experience, that our ignorance of the manner in

* Acts xxvi. 25.

which a thing exists, does not create any doubt of its existence ; and in the ordinary business of life, we admit, without hesitation, the truth of facts which, at the time we admit them, are to us unaccountable. The presumption is, that if a revelation be given, it will contain more facts of the same kind ; and it addresses you as reasonable creatures, if it require you, in judging of the facts which it proposes to your belief, to follow out the same principles upon which you are accustomed to proceed with regard to the facts which you see or hear. If the books of the New Testament be tried with this caution by the standard of reason, they will not be found to contain any of that contradiction which might entitle you to reject them before you examine their evidence. There are doctrines, to the full apprehension of which our limited faculties are inadequate ; and there has been much perplexity and misapprehension in the presumptuous attempts to explain these doctrines. But the manner in which the books themselves state the doctrines, cannot appear to any philosophical mind to involve an absurdity. The system of religion and morality which they deliver is every way worthy of God. It corresponds to all the discoveries which the most enlightened reason has made with regard to the nature and the will of God ; and it comprehends all the duties which are dictated by conscience or clearly suggested by the love of order. The few objections which have been made to the morality of the gospel, as being defective in some points, by not enjoining patriotism or friendship, or too rigorous in others, admit of so clear and so easy a solution, that nothing but the desire of finding fault, joined to the difficulty of dis-

covering any exceptionable circumstance, could have drawn remarks so frivolous from the authors in whose works they appear.

You may, then, without much trouble, satisfy yourselves that neither the manner in which the writers of the New Testament advance their claim, nor the contents of their books, afford any reason for rejecting that claim instantly, without examining the evidence. I do not say that this affords any proof of a divine revelation; for a system may be rational and moral without being divine. This is only a pre-requisite, which every person to whom a system is proposed under that character has a title to demand. But we state the matter very imperfectly when we say, that there is nothing in the manner or the contents of these books which deserves an immediate rejection. A closer attention to the subject not only renders it clear that they may come from God, but suggests many strong presumptions that they cannot be the work of men. These presumptions make up what is called the internal evidence of Christianity.

The *first* branch of this internal evidence is the manifest superiority of that system of religion and morality which is contained in the books of the New Testament, above any that was ever delivered to the world before. Here a Christian divine derives a most important advantage from an intimate acquaintance with the ancient heathen philosophers. He ought not to take upon trust the accounts of their discoveries which succeeding writers have copied from one another. But setting that which they taught, over against the discourses of Jesus Christ, and the writings of his Apostles, he ought to see

with his own eyes the force of that argument which arises from the comparison. Do not think yourselves obliged to disparage the writings of the heathen moralists. The effort which they made to raise their minds above the grovelling superstition in which they were born was honourable to themselves ; it was useful to their disciples, and it scattered some rays of light through the world. It does not become a scholar, who is daily reaping instruction and entertainment from their works, to deny them any part of that applause which is their due ; and it is not necessary for a Christian. You may safely allow that they were very much superior in the knowledge of religion and morality to their countrymen ; and yet, when you take those philosophers who lived before the Christian era, and compare their writings with the books of the New Testament, the disparity appears most striking. The views of God given in these books are not only more sublime than those which occasional passages in the writings of the philosophers discover, but are purified from the alloy which abounds in them, and are at once consistent with, and apposite to, the condition of man. Religion is here uniformly applied to encourage man in the discharge of his duty, to support him under the trials of life, and to cherish every good affection. To love God with all our heart, and strength, and soul, and mind, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, the two commandments of the Gospel, are the most luminous and comprehensive principles of morality that ever were taught. The particular precepts, which, although not systematically deduced, are but the unfolding of those principles, form the heart, regulate the con-

duct, descend into every relation, and constitute the most perfect and refined morality,—a morality not elevated above the concerns or occasions of ordinary men, but sound and practical, which renders the members of society useful, agreeable, and respectable, and at the same time carries them forward by the progressive improvement of their nature to a higher state of being. The precepts themselves are short, expressive, and simple, easily retained, and easily applied; and they are enforced by all those motives which have the greatest power over the human mind. That future life, to which good men in every age had looked forward with an anxious wish, is brought to light in these books. There is not in them the conjecture, the hesitation, the embarrassment which had entered into the language of the wisest philosophers upon this subject. But there is an explicit declaration, delivered in a tone of authority which becomes that Being who can order the condition of his creatures, that this is a season of trial, that there will hereafter be a time of recompence, and that the conduct of men upon earth is to produce everlasting consequences with regard to their future condition. To the fears, of which a being who is conscious of repeated transgressions cannot divest himself, no other system had applied any remedy but the repetition of unavailing sacrifices. These books alone disclose a scheme of Providence adapted to the condition of sinners, announced, introduced, and conducted with a solemnity corresponding to its importance, admirably fitted in all its parts, supposing it to be true, to revive the hopes of the penitent, to restore the dignity, the purity, and happiness of the intelligent creation, and

thus to repair that degeneracy which all writers have lamented, of which every man has experience, and to the cure of which all human means had proved inadequate. This grand idea, which is characteristic of the books of the New Testament, completes their superiority above every other system, and gives a peculiar kind of sublimity to both the religion and the morality of the Gospel.

The *second* branch of the internal evidence of Christianity arises from the condition of those men in whose writings this superior system appears. We can trace a progress in ancient philosophy; we see the principles of science arising out of the occupations of men, collected, improved, abused; and we can mark the effect which both the improvement and the abuse had in producing that degree of perfection which they attained. To every person versant in the history of ancient philosophy, Socrates must appear an extraordinary man. Yet the eminence of Socrates forms only a stage in the progress of his countrymen. His disciples, who have recorded his discourses, were men placed in a most favourable situation for polishing and enlarging their minds; and the Roman philosophers trod in their steps. But, if the books of the New Testament be authentic, the writers who have delivered to us this superior system, were men born in a mean condition, without any advantages of education, and with strong national prejudices, which the low habits formed by their occupations could not fail to strengthen. They have interwoven in their works their history and their manner of thinking. The obscurity of their station is vouched by contemporary writers, and it was one of the reproaches thrown upon the Gospel by its car-

liest adversaries. Yet the conceptions of these mean men upon the most important subjects, far transcend the continued efforts of ancient philosophy ; and the sages of Greece and Rome appear as children when compared with the fishermen of Galilee. From men, whose minds we cannot suppose to have been seasoned with any other notions of divine things than those which they derived from the teaching of the Pharisees, who had obscured the law by their traditions, and loaded it with ceremonies, there arose a pure and spiritual religion. From men, educated in the narrowness and bigotry of the Jewish spirit, there arose a religion which enjoins universal benevolence, a scheme for diffusing the knowledge of the true God over the whole earth, and forming a church out of all the nations under heaven. The divine plan of blessing the human race, in turning them from their iniquity, originated from a little district,—was adopted, not by the whole tribe as a method of retrieving their ancient honours, but by a few individuals in opposition to public authority,—and was prosecuted with zeal and activity under every disadvantage and discouragement. When his contemporaries heard Jesus speak, they said, “ Whence hath this man wisdom ? How knoweth this man letters, having never learned ? ” * “ When the Jewish council heard Peter and John, they marvelled, because they knew that they were ignorant and unlearned men ; ” † and to every candid inquirer, the superiority of that system, and the magnificence of that plan contained in the books of the New Testament, when compared with the natural opportunities of those from whom they

* Matt. xiii. 54. John vii. 15.

† Acts iv. 13.

proceeded, must appear the most inexplicable phenomenon in the history of the human mind, unless we admit the truth of their claim.

A *third* branch of the internal evidence of Christianity arises from the character of Jesus Christ. It is often said with much truth, that the gospel has the peculiar excellence of proposing in the character of its author, an example of all its precepts. That character may also be stated as one branch of the internal evidence of Christianity, whether you consider Jesus as a teacher, or as a man. His manner of teaching was most dignified and most winning. "Never man spake like this man." He taught by parable, by action, and by plain discourse. Out of familiar scenes, out of the objects which surrounded him, and the intercourse of social life, he extracted the most pleasing and useful instruction. He repelled the attacks of his enemies with a gentleness which disarmed, and a wisdom which confounded their malice. There was a plainness, yet a depth in all his sayings. He was tender, persuasive, or severe, according to circumstances; and the discourse, which seemed to have been dictated to him merely by the occasion, is found to convey lasting and valuable counsel to posterity. His character as a man, is allowed to be the most perfect which the world ever saw. All the virtues of which we can form a conception, were united in him with a more exact harmony, and shone with a lustre more bright and more natural, than in any of the sons of men. His descending from the glories of heaven, assuming the weakness of human nature, and voluntarily submitting to all the calamities which he endured for the sake of men, exhibits a degree of benevolence, of magnanimity, and

patience, which far exceeds the conception that Plato formed of the most tried and perfect virtue. The majesty of his divine nature is blended with the fellow feeling and condescension implied in his office ; and although the history of mankind did not afford any model that could here be followed, this singular character is supported throughout, and there is not any one of the words or actions ascribed to him, which does not appear to the most correct taste to become the man Christ Jesus. It is not possible that a manner of teaching, so infinitely superior to that of the Scribes and Pharisees, or that a character so extraordinary, so godlike, so consistent, could have been invented by the fishermen of Galilee. Admit only that the books of the New Testament are authentic, and you must allow that the authors of them drew Jesus Christ from the life. And how do they draw him ? Not in the language of fiction, with sworn panegyric, with a laborious effort to number his deeds, and to record all his sayings, but in the most natural artless manner. Four of his disciples, not many years after his death, when every circumstance could easily be investigated, write a short history of his life. Without attempting to exhaust the subject, without studying to coincide with one another, without directing your attention to the shining parts of his history, or marking any contrast between him and other men, they leave you, from a few facts, to gather the character of the man whom they had followed. Thus you learn his innocence not from their protestations, but from the whole complexion of his life, from the declaration of the judge who condemned him ; of the centurion who attended his execution ; of a traitor, who, having been admit-

ted into his family, was a witness of his most retired actions, who had no tie of affection, of delicacy, or consistency, to restrain him from divulging the whole truth, and who might have pleaded the secret wickedness of his master as an apology for his own baseness, who would have been amply repaid for his information, and yet who died with these words in his mouth, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."* Had Judas borne no such testimony, an appeal to him was the most unsafe method in which the writers of this history could attest the innocence of their master. But if the wisdom of God had ordained, that even in the family of Jesus the wrath of his enemies should thus praise him, it was most natural for one of the evangelists to record so striking a circumstance: and I mention it here, only as a specimen of the manner in which the character of Jesus is drawn, not by the colouring of a skilful pencil, but by a continual reference to facts, which to impostors are of difficult invention, and of easy detection, but which, to those who exhibit a real character, are the most natural, the most delightful, and the most effectual method of making their friend known. "Shall we say," writes Rousseau, no uniform champion for the cause of Christianity, "shall we say that the history of the gospel is invented at pleasure? No. It is not thus that men invent. It would be more inconceivable that a number of men had in concert produced this book from their own imaginations, than it is that one man has furnished the subject of it. The morality of the gospel, and its general tone, were beyond the con-

* Matt. xxvii. 4.

ception of Jewish authors ; and the history of Jesus Christ has marks of truth so palpable, so striking, and so perfectly inimitable, that its inventor would excite our admiration more than its hero." *

A *fourth* branch of the internal evidence of Christianity arises from the characters of the apostles of Jesus as drawn in their own writings. Their condition renders the superiority of their doctrine inexplicable, without admitting a divine revelation : their character gives the highest credibility to their pretensions. We seldom read the work of any person, without forming some apprehension of his character ; and if his work represent him as engaged in a succession of trials, pouring forth the sentiments of his heart, and holding, in interesting situations, much intercourse with his fellow creatures, we contract an intimate acquaintance with him before we are done, and we are able to collect from numberless circumstances, whether he be at pains to disguise himself from us, or whether he be really such a man as he wishes to appear. No scene ever was more interesting to the actors, than that in which the writings of the apostles of Jesus exhibit them ; and the gospels and epistles taken together, afford to every attentive reader a complete display of their character. We said, that they appear from their writings devoid of enthusiasm, cool and collected. Yet this coolness is removed at the greatest distance from every mark of imposture. They are at no pains to disguise their infirmities ; all their prejudices shine through their narration ; and they do not assume to themselves any merit for having abandoned them. We see light

* Rousseau, *Emile*, ii. 98.

opening slowly upon their minds, their hopes disappointed, and themselves conducted into scenes very different from those which they had figured. "We trusted," said they, after the death of their master, "that it was he which should have redeemed Israel."* Yet it is not long before they become firm, and cheerful, and resolute. Not overawed by the threatenings of the magistrates, nor shaken by the persecutions which they endured from their countrymen, they devoted their lives to the generous undertaking of spreading through the world the knowledge of that religion which they had embraced. Appearing as the servants of another, they disclaim the honours which their followers were disposed to pay them; they uniformly inculcate quiet inoffensive manners, and a submission to civil authority; and labouring with their hands for the supply of their necessities, they stand forth as patterns of humility and self-denial. The churches to which they write, are the witnesses to posterity of their holy, unblameable conduct; their sincerity and zeal breathe through all their epistles; and, when you read their writings, you behold the most illustrious example of disinterested beneficence, that exalted love of mankind, which made them forego every private consideration, in order to promote the virtue and happiness of those to whom they were sent. They had differences amongst themselves, which they are at no pains to conceal; yet they remained united in the same cause. They had personal enemies in the churches which they planted; yet they were not afraid to reprove, to censure, to excommunicate; and, in the immediate prospect of death, they continued their labour of love.

* Luke xxiv. 21.

Such is the character of the apostles of Jesus, as it appears in their authentic writings, not drawn by themselves, but collected from the facts which they relate, and the letters which they address to those who knew them. It is a character so far raised above the ordinary exertions of mortals, and so diametrically opposite to the Jewish spirit, that we naturally search for some divine cause of its being formed. We are led to consider its existence as a pledge of the truth of that high claim which such men appear not unworthy to make; and this assurance of their veracity which we derive from their conduct, disposes our minds to attend to that external evidence which they offer to adduce.

I have thus stated what appear to me the principal parts of the internal evidence of Christianity. I have not mentioned the style or composition of the books of the New Testament, because although I am of opinion that there are in them instances of sublimity, of tenderness, and of manly eloquence, which are not to be equalled by any human composition, and although the mixture of dignity and simplicity which characterizes these books is most worthy of the author and the subject of them, yet this is a matter of taste, a kind of sentimental proof which will not reach the understandings of all, and where an affirmation may be answered by a denial. The only evidence which Mahomet adduced for his divine mission, was the inimitable excellence of his Koran. Produce me, said he, a single chapter equal to this book, and I renounce my claim. We are not driven to this necessity; and therefore, although every person of true taste reads with the highest admiration many parts of the New Testament, although every

divine ought to cultivate a taste for the sacred classics, and has often occasion to illustrate their beauties, it is better to rest the evidence of our religion upon arguments less controvertible. Neither have I mentioned that inward conviction which the excellence of the matter, the grace of the promises, and the awfulness of the threatenings, produce on every mind disposed by the influence of heaven to receive the truth. This is the witness of the Spirit, the highest and most satisfying evidence of divine revelation; the gift of God, for which we pray, and which every one who asks with a good and honest heart is encouraged to expect. But this witness within ourselves, although it removes every shadow of doubt from our own breasts, cannot be stated to others. They are to be convinced, not by our feelings but by their own; and the truth of that fact, upon which the Deistical controversy turns, must be established by arguments which every understanding may apprehend, and with regard to which the experience of one man cannot be opposed to the experience of another. Of this kind are the points which I have stated; the superior excellence of that system contained in the books of the New Testament, taken in conjunction with the condition of those whom we know to be the authors of them, the character of Jesus Christ, as drawn by his disciples, and their own character as it appears from their writings. I do not say that these arguments will have equal force with all; but I say that they are fitted by their nature to make an impression upon every understanding which considers them with attention and candour. I allow that they form only

a presumptive evidence for the high claim advanced in these books ; and I consider the external evidence of Christianity as absolutely necessary to establish our faith. But I have called your attention particularly to the various branches of this internal evidence, not only because the result of the four taken together appears to me to form a very strong presumption, but also because they constitute a principal part of the study of a divine. By dwelling upon these branches—by reading with care the many excellent books which treat of them,—and, above all, by searching the Scriptures with a special view to perceive the force of this internal evidence, your sense of the excellence of Christianity is confirmed ; your hearts are made better, and you acquire the most useful furniture for those public ministrations in which it will be more your business to confirm them that believe, than to convince the gainsayers. The several points which I have stated perpetually recur in our discourses to the people ; our lectures and our sermons are full of them ; and therefore, the more extensive and various our information is with regard to these points, and the deeper the impression which the frequent contemplation of them has made upon our own minds, we are the better able to magnify, in the eyes of those for whose sakes we labour, the unsearchable riches of the Gospel, and to build them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

Newcome on the Character of our Saviour.

Leechman's Sermons.

Conybeare's Answer to Tindal.

Leland on the Advantages of the Christian Revelation.

Leland's View of the Deistical Writers.

Duchal's Sermons.

Jenyns on the Internal Evidences of Christianity.

Macknight on the Truth of the Gospel History.

Paley's Evidences of Christianity, Vol. II.

Bishop Porteus' Summary of the Evidences of Christianity.

CHAP. IV.

DIRECT OR EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

HAVING satisfied your minds that the books of the New Testament are authentic and genuine, that they contain nothing upon account of which they deserve immediately to be rejected, and that their contents afford a very strong presumption of their being what they profess to be,—a revelation from God to man, it is natural next to inquire what is the direct evidence in support of this presumption ; for, in a matter of such infinite importance, it is not desirable to rest entirely upon presumptions : and it is not to be supposed that the strongest evidence which the nature of the case admits will be withheld. The Gospel professes to offer such evidence ; and our Lord distinguishes most accurately between the amount of that presumptive evidence which arises from the excellence of Christianity, and the force of that direct proof which he brought. Of the presumptive evidence he thus speaks : “ If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” * *i. e.* Every man of an honest mind will infer from the nature of my doctrine, that it is of Divine origin. But of the direct proof he says : “ If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not

* John vii. 17.

had sin. But now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.” “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not : But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.” * To the direct proof he constantly appeals : “The works which the Father hath given me to do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.” † He declares, that the same works which he did, and greater than them, should his servants do : ‡ And what these works are, we learn from his answer to the disciples of John the Baptist, who brought to him this question, “Art thou he that should come ?” “Go,” said he, “and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk ; the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised.” § The Gospel then professes to be received as a divine revelation upon the footing of miracles ; and, therefore, every person who examines into the truth of our religion, ought to have a clear apprehension of the nature of that claim.

That I may not pass hurriedly over so important a subject, I have been led to divide my discourse upon miracles into three parts : in the first of which I shall state the force of that argument for the truth of Christianity which arises from the miracles of Jesus recorded in the New Testament.

* John xv. 24 ; x. 37, 38.

† John v. 36.

‡ John xiv. 12.

§ Matt. xi. 4, 5.

SECTION I.

ALL that we know of the Almighty is gathered from his works. He speaks to us by the effects which he produces ; and the signatures of power, wisdom, and goodness, which appear in the objects around us, are the language in which God teaches man the knowledge of himself. From these objects we learn the providence as well as the existence of God ; because, while the objects are in themselves great and stupendous, many of them appear to us in motion, and through the whole of nature, we observe operations which indicate not only the original exertions, but also the continued agency of a supreme invisible power. These operations are not desultory. By experience and information we are able to trace a certain regular course, according to which the Almighty exercises his power throughout the universe ; and all the business of life proceeds upon the supposition of the uniformity of his operations. We are often, indeed, reminded that our experience and information are very limited. Extraordinary appearances at particular seasons astonish the nations of the earth : new powers of nature unfold themselves in the progress of our discoveries ; and the accumulation of facts collected and arranged by successive generations, serves to enlarge our conceptions of the greatness and the order of that system to which we belong. But although we do not pretend to be acquainted with the whole course of nature, yet the more that we know, we are the more confirmed in the belief that there is an established course : and every true philosopher is encouraged

by the fruit of his own researches to entertain the hope, that some future age will be able to reconcile with that course, appearances which his ignorance is at present unable to explain.

Although the business of life and the speculations of philosophy proceed upon the uniformity of the course of nature, yet it cannot be understood by those who believe in the existence of a Supreme Intelligent Being, that this uniformity excludes his interposition whensoever he sees meet to interpose. We use the phrase, laws of nature, to express the method in which, according to our observation, the Almighty usually operates. We call them laws, because they are independent of us, because they serve to account for the most discordant phenomena, and because the knowledge of them gives us a certain command over nature. But it would be an abuse of language to infer from their being called laws of nature, that they bind him who established them. It would be recurring to the principles of atheism, to fate, and blind necessity, to say that the author of nature is obliged to act in the manner in which he usually acts ; and that he cannot, in any given circumstances, depart from the course which we observe. The departure, indeed, is to us a novelty. We have no principles by which we can foresee its approach, or form any conjecture with regard to the measure and the end of it. But if we conceive worthily of the Ruler of the universe, we shall believe that all these departures entered into the great plan which he formed in the beginning ; that they were ordained and arranged by him ; and that they arise at the time which he appointed, and fulfil the purposes of his wisdom.

There is not then any mutability or weakness in those occasional interpositions which seem to us to suspend the laws and to alter the course of nature. The Almighty Being, who called the universe out of nothing, whose creating hand gave a beginning to the course of nature, and whose will must be independent of that which he himself produced, acts for wise ends, and at particular seasons, not in that manner which he has enabled us to trace, but in another manner concerning which he has not furnished us with the means of forming any expectation, and which is resolvable merely into his good pleasure. The one manner is his ordinary administration, under which his reasonable offspring enjoy security, advance in the knowledge of nature, and receive much instruction: the other manner is his extraordinary administration, which, although foreseen by him as a part of the scheme of his government, appears strange to his intelligent creatures, but which, by this strangeness, may promote purposes, to them most important and salutary. It may rouse their attention to the natural proofs of the being and perfections of God; it may afford a practical confutation of the scepticism and materialism to which false philosophy often leads; and, rebuking the pride and the security of man, may teach the nations to know that the Lord God reigneth "in heaven and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." *

To such moral purposes as these, any alteration of the course of nature, by the immediate interposition of the Almighty, may be subservient; and no

* Psalm cxxxv. 6.

man will presume to say that our limited faculties can assign all the reasons which may induce the Almighty thus to interpose. But we can clearly discern one most important end which may be promoted by those alterations of the course of nature, in which the agency of men, or other visible ministers of the divine power, is employed.

The circumstances of the intelligent creation may render it highly expedient that, in addition to that original revelation of the nature and the will of God which they enjoy by the light of reason, there should be superadded an extraordinary revelation, to remove the errors which had obscured their knowledge, to enforce the practice of their duty, or to revive and extend their hopes. The wisest ancient philosophers wished for a divine revelation; and to any one who examines the state of the old heathen world in respect of religion and morality, it cannot appear unworthy of the Father of his creatures to bestow such a blessing. This revelation, supposing it to be given, may either be imparted to every individual mind, or be confined to a few chosen persons, vested with a commission to communicate the benefits of it to the rest of the world. It is certainly possible for the Father of spirits to act upon every individual mind so as to give that mind the impression of an extraordinary revelation: it is as easy for the Father of spirits to do this, as to act upon a few minds. But, in this case, departures from the established course of nature would be multiplied without end. In the illumination of every individual, there would be an immediate extraordinary interposition of the Almighty. But extraordinary interpositions so frequent would lose their nature, so as to be confounded with the ordi-

nary light of reason and conscience: or if they were so striking as to be, in every case, clearly discriminated, they would subdue the understanding, and overawe the whole soul, so as to extort, by the feeling of the immediate presence of the Creator, that submission and obedience which it is the character of a rational agent to yield with deliberation and from choice. It appears, therefore, more consistent with the simplicity of nature, and with the character of man, that a few persons should be ordained the instruments of conveying a divine revelation to their fellow-creatures; and that the extraordinary circumstances which must attend the giving such a revelation should be confined to them. But it is not enough that these persons feel the impression of a divine revelation upon their own minds: it is not enough that, in their communications with their fellow-creatures, they appear to be possessed of superior knowledge, and more enlarged views: it is possible that their knowledge and views may have been derived from some natural source; and we require a clear indisputable mark to authenticate the singular and important commission which they profess to bear. It were presumptuous in us to say what are the marks of such a commission which the Almighty can give; for our knowledge of what He can do, is chiefly derived from our observation of what He has done. But we may say, that, according to our experience of the divine procedure, there can be no mark of a divine commission more striking and more incontrovertible, than that the persons who bear it should have the privilege of altering the course of nature by a word of their mouths. The revelation made to their minds is invisible; and all the out-

ward appearances of it may be delusive. But extraordinary works, beyond the power of man, performed by them, are a sensible outward sign of a power which can be derived from God alone. If he has invested them with this power, it is not incredible that he has made a revelation to their minds ; and if they constantly appeal to the works, which are the sign of the power, as the evidence of the invisible revelation, and of the commission with which it was accompanied, then we must either believe that they have such a commission, or we are driven to the horrid supposition that God is the author of a falsehood, and conspires with these men to deceive his creatures.

When I call the extraordinary works performed by these men, the sign of a power derived from God, you recollect that all the language which we interpret consists of signs ; *i. e.* objects and operations which fall under our senses, employed to indicate that which is unseen. What are the looks, the words, and the actions of our fellow-creatures, but signs of that internal disposition which is hidden from our view ? What are the appearances which bodies exhibit to our senses, but signs of the inward qualities which produce these appearances ? What are the works of nature, but signs of that supreme intelligence, “whom no man hath seen at any time?”* Upon this principle, all those events and operations, beyond the compass of human power, which happen according to the established course of nature, form part of the foundations of Natural Religion ; and any person who foretells or conducts them, only discovers his acquaintance with that course, and his sagacity

* John i. 18.

in applying what we call the laws of nature. Upon the same principle, all those events and operations which happen in opposition to the established course of nature, imply an exertion of the same power which established that course, because they counteract it; and any person who, by a word, produces such events and operations, discovers that this power is committed to him. To command the sun to run his race until the time of his going down, and to command him to stand still about a whole day, as in the valley of Gibeon in the time of Joshua, * are two commands which destroy one another; and therefore, if we believe that the will of the Almighty Ruler of the universe produces an uniform obedience to the first, we must believe that the obedience which, upon one occasion, was yielded to the second, was the effect of his will also. As no creature can stop the working of his hand, every interruption in that course according to which he usually operates, happens by his permission; and the power of altering the course of nature, by whomsoever it be exerted, must be derived from the Lord of nature.

This is the reasoning upon which we proceed, when we argue for the truth of a revelation, from extraordinary works performed by those through whom it is communicated; and here we see the important purpose which the Almighty promotes by employing the agency of men to change the order of nature. Those changes which proceed immediately from his hand, however well fitted to impress his creatures with a sense of his sovereignty, do not of themselves prove any new proposition, because their

* Joshua x. 12—14.

connexion with that proposition is not manifest. But, when visible agents perform works beyond the power of man, and contrary to the course of nature, they give a sign of the interposition of the Almighty, which, being applied by their declaration to the doctrine which they teach, becomes a voucher of the truth of what they say. To works of this kind, the term *miracles* is properly applied; and they form what has been called the seal of heaven, implying that delegation of the sovereign authority of the Lord of all, which appears to be reserved in the conduct of providence as the credential of those to whom a divine commission is at any time granted. This was the rod put into the hand of Moses, wherewith to do signs and wonders, that Pharaoh and the children of Israel might believe that the Lord God had sent him. This was the sign given to Elijah, that it might be known that he was a man of God; and this was the witness which the Father bore to "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles, which God did by him in the midst of the people," * and to the apostles of Jesus who went forth to preach the Gospel, "the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by signs following." †

The nature of the revelation contained in the books of the New Testament affords a very strong presumptive proof that it comes from God; whilst the works done by Jesus and his Apostles are the direct proof; and the two proofs conspire with the most perfect harmony. The presumptive proof explains the importance and the dignity of that occasion upon which the Almighty was pleased to make the inter-

* Acts ii. 22.

† Mark xvi. 20.

position, of which these works are the sign : The direct proof accounts for that transcendent excellence, in the doctrine and the character of the author of this system, which, upon the supposition of its being of human origin, appeared to be inexplicable ; and thus the internal and external evidence of Christianity, by the aid which they lend to one another, make us “ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us.” *

We have found, that the reasoning involved in the argument from miracles, proceeds upon the same principles by which a sound theist infers the being and perfections of God : in both cases, we discover God by his works, which are to us the signs of his agency. This analogy between the proofs of natural and revealed religion is very much illustrated by considering the particular miracles recorded in the Gospel. When we investigate the evidences of natural religion, we find that any works manifestly exceeding human power would lead us, in the course of fair reasoning, to a Being antecedent to the human race, superior to them in strength, and independent of them in the mode of his existence. But it is the transcendent grandeur of those works which we behold, their inimitable beauty, their endless variety, their harmony, and utility ; it is this infinite superiority of the works of nature above the works of art, which renders the argument completely satisfying, and leaves no doubt in our minds, either of the power or of the moral character of that Being from whom they proceed. In like manner, although, in stating the argument from miracles in support of the Gos-

* 1 Peter iii. 15.

pel, we have reasoned fairly upon this simple principle, that they are interruptions of the course of nature, yet, when we come to consider those particular interruptions upon which the Gospel founds its claim, we perceive that their nature furnishes a very strong confirmation of the general argument, and that, like the other works of God, they proclaim their Author.

In Him who ruled the raging of the sea, and stilled the tempest, we recognise the Lord of the universe. In that command which gave life to the dead, we recognise the author of life. In the works of Him who, by a word of his mouth, cured the most inveterate diseases, unstopped the ears which had never admitted a sound, opened the eyes which had never seen the light, conferred upon the most distracted mind the exercise of reason, and restored the withered, maimed, distorted limb, we recognise the Former of our bodies and the Father of our spirits. This is the very power by which all things consist, the energy of Him "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." * The miracles of the Gospel were performed without preparation or concert; they were instantaneous in the manner of being produced, yet their effects were permanent; and, like the works of nature, although they came without effort from the hands of the workman, they bore to be examined by the nicest eye. There does not appear in them that poverty which marks all human exertions; neither the strength nor the skill of Him who did them seemed to be exhausted; but there was a fulness of power, a multiplicity, a diversity, a readiness in the exercise of it, by

* Acts xvii. 28.

which they resemble the riches of God that replenish the earth. Yet they were free from parade and ostentation. There were no attempts to dazzle, no anxiety to set off every work to the best advantage, no waste of exertion, no frivolous accompaniments; but a sobriety, a decorum, all the dignified simplicity of nature. The extraordinary power which appeared in the miracles of the Gospel was employed not to hurt or to terrify, but to heal, to comfort, and to bless. The gracious purpose to which they ministered declared their divine origin; and they who beheld a man who had the command of nature, and “who went about doing good,” * dispensing with a bountiful hand the gifts of heaven, lightening the burdens of human life, and accompanying every exercise of his power with a display of tenderness, condescension, and love, were taught to venerate the messenger, and the “express image” of that Almighty Lord, whose kingdom excels at once in majesty and in grace.

As the religion which these miracles were wrought to attest, is in every respect worthy of God, so they were selected with divine wisdom to illustrate the peculiar doctrines of that religion; and in the admirable fitness with which the nature of the proof is accommodated to the nature of the thing to be proved, we have an instance of the same kind with many which the creation affords of the perfection of the divine workmanship. Jesus came preaching forgiveness of sins; and he brought with him a sensible sign of his having received a commission to bestow this invisible gift. Disease was introduced

* Acts x. 38.

into the world by sin. Jesus therefore cured all manner of disease that we might know that he had power to forgive sins also. His being able to remove, not by the slow uncertain applications of human art, but instantly, by a word of his mouth spoken at any distance, those temporal maladies which are the present visible fruits of sin, was an assurance to the world of his being able to remove the spiritual evils which flow from the same source. It was a specimen, a symbolical representation of his character as physician of souls. Jesus was that seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent, and he gave in his miracles a sensible sign of the fall of Satan. The influence which this adversary of mankind in every age exercises over the minds of men, was in that age connected with a degree of power over their bodies. It was the general belief in Judea, that certain diseases proceeded from the possession which his emissaries took of the human body. To the Jews therefore, the casting out devils was an ocular demonstration that Jesus was able to destroy the works of the devil. It was the beginning of the triumphs of this mighty prince, a trophy which he brought from the land of the enemy, to assure his followers of a complete victory. I have bound the strong man. Do you ask a proof? See, I enter his house and spoil his goods. I set free the mind and conscience which he had enslaved. My people will feel their freedom, and will need no foreign proof. But does the world require one? See, by the finger of God, I set free those bodies which Satan torments. His raising the dead was a practical confirmation of that new doctrine of his religion, that the hour is coming when they who are

in their graves, shall hear his voice, and shall come forth to the resurrection. You cannot say that the thing is impossible ; for you see in his miracles a sample of that almighty power which shall quicken them that sleep in the dust, a sensible sign that Jesus “ hath abolished death,” and is able to “ ransom his people from the power of the grave.”*

Other miracles of Jesus may be accommodated to the doctrines of religion, and much spiritual instruction may be derived from them. But these three, the cure of diseases, the casting out devils, and the raising the dead, are applied by himself in the manner which I have stated. They are not only a confirmation of his divine mission, by being a display of the same kind of power which appears in creation and providence, but, from their nature, they are a proof of the characteristical doctrines of the Gospel ; and we are led by considering works so great in themselves, and at the same time so apposite to the purpose for which they were wrought, to transfer to the miracles of Jesus that devout exclamation which an enlarged view of the creation dictated to the Psalmist : “ How manifold are thy works, O Lord ; in wisdom hast thou made them all.”†

I have thus stated the force of that argument which arises from the miracles of Jesus, as they are recorded in the New Testament. They who beheld them said, “ When Messiah cometh, will he do more miracles than those which this man doth ? This is the prophet.” ‡ They spoke what they felt, and the deductions of the most enlightened reason upon this

* 2 Tim. i. 10 ; Hos. xiii. 14.

† Psalm civ. 24.

‡ John vii. 31—40.

subject accord with the feelings of every unbiassed spectator. But we are not the spectators of the miracles of Jesus : the report only has reached our ears ; and some farther principles are necessary in our situation to enable us to apply the argument from miracles in support of the truth of Christianity.

SECTION II.

IT appeared more consistent with the simplicity of nature and the character of man, that one or more persons should be ordained the instruments of conveying an extraordinary revelation to the rest of the world, than that it should be imparted to every individual mind. The commission of these messengers of heaven may be attested by changes upon the order of nature, which the Almighty accomplishes through their agency. But the works which they do, are objects of sense only to their contemporaries with whom they converse. Without a perpetual miracle exhibited in their preservation, those facts which are the proof of the divine revelation must be transmitted to succeeding ages, by oral or written tradition, and, like all other facts in the history of former times, they must constitute part of that information which is received upon the credit of testimony. Accordingly we say, that Jesus Christ, for a few years, did signs and wonders in the presence of his disciples, and before all the people : the report of them was carried through the world after his departure from it by chosen witnesses, to whom he had

imparted the power of working miracles ; and many of the miracles done both by him and his apostles are now written in authentic genuine records which have reached our days, that we also may believe that he is the Son of God. Supposing then we admit, that the eye-witnesses of the miracles of Jesus reasoned justly when they considered them as proofs of a divine commission ; still it remains to be inquired, whether the evidence which has transmitted these miracles to us, is sufficient to warrant us in drawing the same inference which we should have drawn if we ourselves had seen them.

There are three questions which require to be discussed upon this subject. Whether miracles are capable of proof ? Whether the testimony borne to the miracles of Jesus was credible at the time it was given ? And whether the distance at which we live from that time destroys, or in any material degree impairs its original credibility ?

1. It was said by one of the subtlest reasoners of modern times, that a miracle is incapable of being proved by testimony. His argument was this : “ Our belief of any fact attested by eye-witnesses rests upon our experience of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses. But a firm and unalterable experience hath established the laws of nature. When, therefore, witnesses attest any fact which is a violation of the laws of nature, here is a contest of two opposite experiences. The proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can be imagined ; and if so, it cannot be surmounted by a proof from testimony, because testimony rests upon experience.” Mr. Hume boasted of this reasoning as un-

answerable, and he holds it forth in his Essay on Miracles as an everlasting check to superstition. The principles upon which the reasoning proceeds have been closely sifted, and their fallacy completely exposed, in Campbell's Dissertation on Miracles ; one of the best polemical treatises that ever was written. Mr. Hume meets here with an antagonist who is not inferior to himself in acuteness, and who, supported by the goodness of his cause, has gained a triumphant victory. I consider this dissertation as a standard book for students of divinity. You will find in it accurate reasoning, and much information upon the whole subject of miracles, and, in particular, a thorough investigation of the question which I have now stated.

It is not true that our belief in testimony rests wholly upon experience ; for, as every man has a principle of veracity which leads him to speak truth, unless his mind be under some particular wrong bias, so we are led, by the consciousness of this principle, and by the analogy which we suppose to exist between our own mind and the mind of others, to believe that they also speak the truth, until we learn by experience that they mean to deceive us. It is not accurate to state the firm and unalterable experience which is said to establish the laws of nature as somewhat distinct from testimony ; for since the observations of any individual are much too limited to enable him to judge of the uniformity of nature, the word experience, in the sense in which it is used in this proposition, presupposes a faith in testimony, for it comprehends the observations of others communicated to us through that channel. It is not true that a firm and unalterable experience hath establish-

ed the laws of nature, because the histories of all countries are filled with accounts of deviations from them.

These are objections to the principles of Mr. Hume's argument, which his subtle antagonist brings forward, and presses with much force. But, independently of these inferior points, he has shown that the argument itself is a fallacy; and the sophism lies here. Experience vouches that which is past; but, if the word has any meaning, experience does not vouch that which is future. Our judgment of the future is an inference which we draw from the reports of experience concerning the past: the reports may be true, and yet our inference may be false. Thus experience declares that it is not agreeable to the usual course of nature for the dead to rise. Suppose twelve men to declare that the dead do usually arise, there would be proof against proof; a particular testimony set against our own personal observations, and against all the reports and observations of others which we had collected upon that subject. But suppose twelve men to declare that one dead man did arise, here is no opposition between the reports of experience and their testimony; for it does not fall within the province of experience to declare that it is impossible for the dead to rise, or that the usual course of nature in this matter shall never be departed from. We may hastily draw such inference from the reports of experience. But the inference is our own: we have taken too wide a step in making it; and it is a sophism to say, that because experience vouches the premises, experience vouches also that conclusion which is drawn from them merely by a defect in our mode of reasoning.

When witnesses then attest miracles, experience and testimony do not contradict one another. Experience declares that such events do not usually happen : testimony declares that they have happened in that instance. Each makes its own report, and the reports of both may be true. Instances somewhat similar occur in other cases. Unusual events, extraordinary phenomena in nature, strange revolutions in politics, uncommon efforts of genius or of memory, are all received upon testimony. Magnetism, electricity, and galvanism are opposite to the properties of matter formerly known. Yet many who never saw these new powers exerted, give credit to the reports of the experiments that have been made. Experience indeed begets a presumption with regard to the future. We are disposed to believe that the facts which have been uniformly observed will recur in similar circumstances ; and we act upon this presumption. But as new situations may occur, in which a difference of circumstances produces a difference in the event, and as we do not pretend to be acquainted with all the circumstances which discriminate every new case, this presumption is overturned by credible testimony relating facts different from those which have been observed. Without the presumption suggested by experience, we should live in perpetual amazement ; without the credit given to testimony, we should often remain ignorant, and be exposed to danger. By the one, we accommodate our conduct to the general uniformity of events ; by the other, we are apprized of new facts which sometimes arise. The provision made for us by the Author of our nature is in this

way complete, and we are prepared for our whole condition.

There does not appear, then, to be any foundation for saying that a miracle is, from its nature, incapable of being proved by testimony. As nothing can hinder the Author of nature from changing the order of nature whensoever he sees meet, and as one very important purpose in his government is most effectually promoted by employing, at particular seasons, the ministry of men to change this order, a miracle is always a possible event, and becomes, in certain circumstances, not improbable. Like every other possible fact, therefore, it may be communicated to such as have not seen it by the testimony of such as have. It is natural indeed, to weigh very scrupulously the testimony of a miracle, because testimony has in this case to encounter that presumption against the fact which is suggested by experience. The person who relates it may, from ignorance, mistake an unusual application of the laws of nature for a suspension of them; an exercise of superior skill and dexterity for a work beyond the power of man; or he may be disposed to amuse himself, and to promote some private end by our credulity. Accordingly, we do not receive any extraordinary fact in common life upon the credit of every man whom we chance to meet. We attend to the character and the manner of the reporter; we lay together the several parts of his report, and we call in every circumstance which may assist us in judging whether he is speaking the truth. The more extraordinary and important the fact be, there is the more reason for this caution; and it is especially proper, in examining the reports of those facts which deserve the name of mi-

racles, *i. e.* works contrary to the course of nature, said to be performed by man, as the evidences of an extraordinary revelation.

2. We are thus led to the second question which I stated, Whether the testimony borne to the miracles of Jesus was credible?

The Apostles were chosen by Jesus to be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, and of his resurrection from the dead. This was the commission which they received from him immediately before his ascension, the character under which they appeared before the Jewish council, and the office which they assume in their writings. It is not my business to spread out the circumstances which render theirs a credible testimony, and give to each its proper colouring. It is enough for me to mention the sources of argument.

In judging of the credibility of this testimony, you are led back to that branch of the internal evidence of Christianity which arises from the character of the Apostles, as it appears in their writings—in their unblemished conduct, and distinguished virtues—in that soundness of understanding, and calmness of temper which are opposite to enthusiasm,—and in those simple, artless manners which are most unlike to imposture. You are further to observe, that their relation of the miracles of Jesus consists of palpable facts, which were the objects of sense. The power by which a man born blind received his sight was invisible; but that the man was born blind might be learned with certainty from his parents or neighbours: and that, by obeying a simple command of Jesus, he recovered his sight, was manifest to every

spectator. The power which raised a dead man was invisible ; but that Jesus and his disciples met a large company carrying forth a young man to his burial—that this young man was known to his friends, and believed by all the company to be truly dead, and that upon Jesus' coming to the bier, and bidding him arise, he sat up and began to speak ; all these are points which it did not require superior learning or sagacity to discern, but concerning which, any person in the exercise of his senses, who was present and who bestowed an ordinary degree of attention, could not be mistaken. The case is the same with the other miracles. We are not required to rest upon the judgment of the Apostles—upon their acquaintance with physical causes, for the miraculous nature of the works which Jesus did ; for they give us simply the facts which they saw, and leave us to make the inference for ourselves. There is no amplification in their manner of recording the miracles, no attempt to excite our wonder, no exclamation of surprise upon their part ; they relate the most marvellous exertions of their Master's power with the same calmness as ordinary facts ; they sometimes mention the feelings of joy and admiration which were uttered by the other spectators ; they hardly ever express their own.

This temperance with which the Apostles speak, of all that Jesus did, gives every reader a security in receiving their report, which he would not have felt, had the narration been turgid. Yet he cannot entertain any doubt of their being convinced that the works of Jesus were truly miraculous ; for by these works they were attached to a stranger. While they lived in honest obscurity, an extraordinary personage

appeared in their country, and called upon them to follow him. They left their occupations and their homes, and continued for some years the witnesses of all that he did. They were Jews, and had those feelings which have ever distinguished the sons of Abraham with regard to the national religion. Their education, instead of enlarging their views, had confirmed their prejudices. Yet they were converted: with every thing else, they forsook their religion, and joined a man who was the author of a system which professed to supersede the law of Moses. They received him as the promised Messiah. But, possessed with the fond hopes of the Jewish nation, they believed that he was a temporal prince, come to restore the kingdom to Israel, and to make the Jews masters of the world. They were undeceived. Yet this disappointment did not shake their faith. Although they had followed Jesus in the expectation of being the ministers and favourites of an earthly prince, they were content to remain, during his life, the wandering attendants of a man who had "not where to lay his head;" and they appeared in public, after his departure from the earth, as his disciples. The body of the Jewish people, attached to the law of Moses, regarded them as traitors to their nation. To the priests and rulers, whose influence depended upon the established faith, they were peculiarly obnoxious. That civil power with which the spirit of the Jewish religion had invested its ministers, was directed against the apostles of Jesus: and without any attempt to disprove the facts which they asserted, every effort was made to silence them by force. They were imprisoned and called before the most august tribunal of the state. There the high priest;

armed with all the dignity and authority of his sacred office, commanded them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus. Yet these men, educated in servile dread of the higher powers, with the prospect of instant punishment before their eyes, declared that they would obey God rather than man. Their conduct corresponded to this heroic declaration. Although exposed to the fury of the populace and the vengeance of the rulers, they continued in the words of truth and soberness to execute their commission; and they sealed their testimony with their blood; martyrs, not to speculative opinions in which they might be mistaken, but to facts which they declared they had seen and heard, which they said they were commanded to publish, and which no threatening or punishment could make them either deny or conceal.

The history of mankind has not preserved a testimony so complete and satisfying as that which I have now stated. If, in conformity to the exhibitions which the writings of these men give of their character, you suppose their testimony to be true, then you can give the most natural account of every part of their conduct, of their conversion, their steadfastness, and their heroism. But if notwithstanding every appearance of truth you suppose their testimony to be false, inexplicable circumstances and glaring absurdities crowd upon you. You must suppose that twelve men of mean birth, of no education, living in that humble station which placed ambitious views out of their reach and far from their thoughts, without any aid from the state, formed the noblest scheme that ever entered into the mind of man, adopted the most daring means of executing that scheme, and conducted it with such address as

to conceal the imposture under the semblance of simplicity and virtue. You must suppose that men guilty of blasphemy and falsehood united in an attempt the best contrived, and which has in fact proved the most successful, for making the world virtuous; that they formed this singular enterprise without seeking any advantage to themselves, with an avowed contempt of honour and profit, and with the certain expectation of scorn and persecution; that, although conscious of one another's villainy, none of them ever thought of providing for his own security by disclosing the fraud; but that, amidst sufferings the most grievous to flesh and blood, they persevered in their conspiracy to cheat the world into piety, honesty, and benevolence.

They who can swallow such suppositions have no title to object to miracles. They should remember that there is a moral as well as a physical order; that there are certain general principles by which human actions are regulated, and upon which we are accustomed to proceed in our judgments of the conduct of men; and that it is much more difficult to conceive that, in opposition to those principles which analogy and experience have established, such a testimony as the apostles uttered should be false, than that the laws of nature in some particular instances should have been suspended. Of the suspension of the laws of nature we can give a rational account: the purpose for which it is said to have been made renders it not incredible. But the falsehood of testimony in such circumstances would be a phenomenon in the history of the human mind so strange and inexplicable, that we need not be afraid to apply to this case the words of Mr. Hume, al-

though he certainly did not mean them to be so applied : “ No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.” The falsehood of the testimony of the apostles would be more miraculous, *i. e.* it is more improbable than any fact which they attest.

3. But although the testimony of the apostles appears, upon all the principles according to which we judge of such matters, to have been credible at the time when it was given, it remains to be inquired, whether the distance at which we live from that time does, in any material degree, impair to us its original credibility.

It is allowed that the testimony of the apostles received the strongest confirmation from its having been emitted immediately after the ascension of Jesus, in the very place where they said he had performed many of his mighty works, under the eye of that government which had persecuted him, and in presence of multitudes to whom they appealed as witnesses of what they declared. This must be allowed by all who are qualified to judge of evidence. Now let it be remembered that the benefit of this confirmation is not lost to us, because, although their testimony was at first oral, given in their preaching to those whom they converted, it was soon recorded in books which we receive upon satisfying evidence as authentic and genuine. There is therefore no room to allege in disparagement of this testimony, the inaccuracy of verbal reports, or the natural disposition to exaggerate in the repetition of every extraordinary event. We are put in possession of the

facts as they were published in the lifetime of the apostles, without the embellishments of succeeding ages; and every circumstance which moved those who heard their testimony, is preserved in their books to establish our faith.

The early publication of the Gospels and Acts is to us an unquestionable voucher of the following most important facts,—that the miracles of our Lord and his apostles were not done in a corner before a few select friends, and by them artfully spread through the world, but were performed openly, in the fields, in the city, in the temple, before enemies who had every opportunity of examining them, who did not regard them with indifference, who were alarmed with the effect which they produced upon the minds of the people, and were zealous in bringing forward every objection. Had any one of these circumstances been false, the early publication of books asserting them would have overturned the scheme. Further, there is much particularity in the narration of many of the miracles: reference is made to time and place; many local circumstances are introduced; persons are marked out, not only by their distress, but by their rank and their names; the emotions of the spectators, the joy of those who received deliverance, the consultations held by rulers, and the public orders in consequence of certain miracles, all enter into the record of these books. While every intelligent reader discerns in this particular detail the most accurate acquaintance with the prejudices and the manners of the times, and is from thence satisfied that the books are authentic, he must also be satisfied that a detail which, by its particularity, called so much attention, and admitted, at the time

it was published, of so easy investigation, is itself a voucher of its own truth. Again, the history of the miracles is so closely interwoven with the rest of the narration, that any man who reads it may be satisfied that it could not have been inserted after the books were published. There are numberless allusions to the miracles even in those passages where none of them are recorded; the faith of the first disciples is said to have been founded upon them, and the change upon their sentiments is truly inexplicable, unless we suppose the miracles to have been done in their presence. All, therefore, who received the Gospels and the Acts in early times, when they could easily examine the truth of the facts, may be considered as setting their seal to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles; and the number of the first converts out of Judea and Jerusalem forms, in this way, a cloud of witnesses.

That confirmation of the testimony of the apostles, which appears to be implied in the faith of all the first Christians, is rendered much more striking, by the peculiar nature of a large part of the New Testament. I mean the epistles to the different churches. Paul, in several of the epistles which he sent by particular messengers to those whose names they bear, and which were authenticated to the whole Christian world by his superscription, mentions the miracles which he had performed, the effect which his miracles had produced, and the extraordinary powers which he had imparted. A large portion of the first Epistle to the Corinthians is occupied with a discourse concerning spiritual gifts, in which he speaks of them as common in that church, as abused by many who possessed them, and as inferior in excel-

lence to moral virtue. In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians, which is known to have been the earliest of the apostolical writings, Paul says, "Our Gospel came to you not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost; and they, *i. e.* your own citizens, in their progress through different parts of the world, show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned from idols to serve the living God."* Here is a letter written not twenty years after the ascension of Jesus, sent as soon as it was written to the church of Thessalonica to be read there, and in the neighbouring churches, copied and circulated by those to whom it was addressed, uniformly quoted since that time by the succession of Christian writers, and come down to us with every evidence that can be desired, indeed without any dispute of its being a genuine letter. In this letter the apostle tells the Thessalonians that they had been converted to the Gospel by the miracles of those who preached it, and that the effect which this conversion had produced upon their conduct was talked of everywhere. If these facts had not been known to the Thessalonians, the letter would have been instantly rejected, and the character of him who wrote it would have sunk into contempt. Its being publicly read, held in veneration, and transmitted by them, is a proof that every thing said in it concerning themselves is true, and therefore it is a proof that those who could not be mistaken, believed in the miracles of the apostles of our Lord. This argument is handled by Butler, and all the ablest defenders of our religion; and I have been

* 1 Thess. i. 5, 9.

led to state it particularly, because it has always appeared to me an unanswerable argument, arising out of the books themselves, a confirmation of the testimony of the apostles that is independent of their personal character, and yet is demonstrative of the estimation in which they were held by their contemporaries, and of the credit which we may safely give to their report.

4. It only remains to be added upon this question, that a testimony thus strongly confirmed is not contradicted by any opposite testimony. The books of the New Testament are full of concessions made by the adversaries of Christianity ; concessions, the force of which must be admitted by all who believe the books to be authentic : and it is very remarkable, that concessions of exactly the same kind with those made by the Jews in our Saviour's days, were made by the zealous and learned adversaries of our faith in the first four centuries. Celsus, Porphyry, Hierocles, and Julian did not deny the facts ; they only attempted to disparage them, or to ascribe them to magic. Julian was emperor of Rome in the fourth century. He had renounced Christianity, and his zeal to revive the ancient heathen worship made him the bitterest enemy of a system which condemned all the forms of idolatry. Yet this man, with every wish to overturn the establishment which Christianity had received from Constantine, does not pretend to say in his work against the Christians, that no miracles were performed by Jesus. In one place he says, " Jesus, who rebuked the winds, and walked on the seas, and cast out dæmons, and as you will have it, made the heavens and the earth." In another place, " Jesus has been celebrated about three hundred years, having

done nothing in his lifetime worthy of remembrance, unless any one thinks it a mighty matter to heal lame and blind people, and exorcise dæmoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany.”* The prejudices of the emperor led him to speak slightly of the miracles ; but the facts are admitted by him. It was reserved for infidels at the distance of seventeen hundred years from the event, to dispute a testimony which had appeared satisfying to those who heard it, and which had not received any contradiction in the succession of ages. Because they did not believe in magic, and saw the futility of that account of the works of Jesus which the prejudices of the times had drawn from their predecessors in infidelity, they have taken a new ground, and they affirm, against the principles of human nature, against the faith of history, and the concessions of the earliest adversaries, that the works never were done. But Christianity has nothing to fear from any change in the mode of attack. Sound philosophy will always furnish weapons sufficient to repel the aggressor ; and the truth will be the more firmly established by every display of the mutability of error.

It appears then, that even that part of the external evidence of Christianity, which from its nature is the most likely to be affected by length of time, is not evanescent ; that various circumstances preserve it from diminution ; and that we, in these latter ages, may certainly know the truth of the testimony borne by those who declare in the books of the New Testament that which they saw and heard.

* Lardner's Heath. Test. ch. xlvii.

SECTION III.

THE subject would now be exhausted if the only miracles recorded in history were those to which Jesus and his Apostles made their appeal. This singular attestation, given upon so important an occasion, would then appear a decisive mark of the interposition of the Almighty ; and every person who believes the books of the New Testament to be authentic, might be expected to join in the opinion of Nicodemus, who said to Jesus, " We know that thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him." * But the subject is involved in new difficulties, and assumes a much more complicated form, when we recollect that accounts of prodigies and miracles abound in all history, that these miracles are generally connected with the religion of the country in which the record of them is preserved, and that, as the religions of different countries are widely different, the miracles of one country appear to contradict the miracles of another. If it be said that all the reports of miracles, excepting those recorded in the scriptures, are false, then it follows that there must be a facility of imposition in this matter against which the human mind has never been proof. If some other reports of miracles, besides those in scripture, are admitted to be true, then it seems to follow, that miracles are not the unequivocal mark of a divine commission.

* John iii. 2.

This multitude of reports concerning miracles has afforded much triumph to the adversaries of Christianity, and, in the opinion of Mr. Hume, the authority of any testimony concerning a religious miracle is so much diminished by the ridiculous stories, and the gross impositions of the same kind in all ages, that men of sense should lay down a general resolution to reject it without any examination. The zeal with which he writes, has led him to recommend a resolution very unbecoming a philosopher. At the same time, it must be allowed that, upon the one hand, the prejudice arising from the multitude of false miracles which have been reported and believed, and, upon the other hand, the suspicion that out of the number preserved in ancient history, some may have been real miracles, furnish a very plausible objection against this branch of the external evidence of Christianity; an objection which every person whose business it is to defend the truth of our religion must be prepared to meet; and an objection which there is the more reason for studying with care, because the attempts to answer it have not always been conducted with sufficient ability and prudence, and some zealous champions for Christianity have mistaken the ground which ought to be maintained in repelling this attack.

The four observations which follow, appear to me to embrace the leading points in this controversy, and when properly extended by reading and reflection, will be found sufficient to remove the objection arising from the multitude of miracles mentioned in history.

1. No religion, except the Jewish and Christian, which, by every person who understands the Gospel,

are accounted one religion,—no other religion that we know of, claimed to be received upon the footing of miracles performed by its author.

Some of the ancient lawgivers said, that they had private conferences with the Deity, in which the system of religious or civil polity, which they established, was communicated to them. But none of them pretended to produce, in the presence of the people, changes upon the order of nature. The Pagan mythology was much more ancient than any record of miracles in profane history. Many of the achievements of the gods run back into those periods of which there is no history that is not accounted fabulous ;—some are known to the learned to be an allegorical method of conveying moral or physical truth ; and others are merely the colouring which fable and poetry gave to the transactions of a remote antiquity handed down by oral tradition. The miracles recorded in the times of authentic history coincided with a superstition already established, the influence of which prepared the minds of men for receiving them. They were performed by priests, or men of rank, to whom the people were accustomed to look up with reverence ; generally in temples consecrated by the offerings of ages, where it was impious for the eye of the worshippers to pry too closely ; under the protection of civil government ; and in support of a system which antiquity had hallowed, and which the law commanded the citizens to respect. The miracles of the Gospel, on the other hand, were performed by obscure despised men, in the midst of enemies, as the vouchers of a new doctrine which was accounted an insult to the gods, and which did not flatter the passions of men. It is manifest that the cases are wide-

ly different ; and before proceeding to any particular examination of the heathen miracles, you are warranted in considering the whole multitude of them as clearly discriminated from the miracles recorded in Scripture, by this circumstance, that they were not wrought for the purpose of procuring credit to a new system of faith. In the seventh century, Mahomet appeared in Arabia, calling himself the chief of the prophets of God, sent to extirpate idolatry, and to establish a new and perfect religion. He acknowledged the divine mission both of Moses and of Jesus. He often mentions the evident miracles which Jesus wrought, and he has preserved the names of the persons whom our Lord raised from the dead. Those who opposed him demanded a sign of his mission. He gave various reasons for not complying with this demand, and in different places of the Koran appears solicitous to obviate the doubts which his refusal excited. But although his reasons were not satisfying, and he was harassed with importunity,—although he lived amongst a barbarous unlearned people, and although he possessed a very uncommon share of ability and address, he had the prudence never to make the experiment of working a miracle, and he confesses that God, in his sovereignty, had withheld from him that power. The Church of Rome claims the power which Mahomet did not assume, and the history of that Church is full of wonders said to be performed at the shrines of saints and martyrs, by the divine virtue residing in a relic, or by the power committed to a religious order, to a particular sect, or to the whole Church. But all these are in support of a system already established, and in conformity to the wishes and ex-

pectations of the spectators ; and, like the heathen miracles, they extend the prevailing superstition by introducing or confirming doctrines, rites, and practices, exactly similar to those which had been formerly received.

It appears, then, from this review, that the history of the world does not present, out of that multitude of miracles which it has recorded, any that were performed under the disadvantages which attended the Christian, for the purpose of introducing a change upon the religious sentiments of mankind. All the rest were aided by the prevailing opinions ; these alone were opposed by them : all the rest found men ready to believe ; these alone produced a new faith.

2. As the circumstance which I have mentioned forms, upon a general view of the matter, a clear discrimination of the miracles of the Bible, so, when we enter upon a particular examination, there appears to be the most striking difference between them and all other miracles, in the evidence with which they are transmitted. The testimony for a miracle requires to be tried with caution, because it contradicts the presumption suggested by experience ; and the more instances there are of imposition or mistake in reports of this kind, there is the more reason for weighing every report with the most scrupulous exactness. When we proved the testimony borne by the apostles to the miracles of Jesus, we found a multitude of circumstances which conspire to render it credible. But when we try, by the same standard of sound criticism, the testimony borne either to heathen or to popish miracles, it is found to be very much wanting. Many of the heathen mira-

cles were prodigies which had no connexion with any religious system, or they were phenomena which appeared wonderful to ignorant men, but which a more enlarged acquaintance with nature has enabled us to explain. Others were extraordinary works, recorded long after the time when they are said to have been performed, and recorded by historians who, while they adorn their writings with popular stories, are careful to distinguish the narration, which they consider as authentic, from the reports which they retail, because they received them. The miracles which Tacitus reports as performed by the Emperor Vespasian, the feats of Alexander of Pontus, which we learn from Lucian, who represents him as an impostor, and the works ascribed to Apollonius of Tyana, whom some of the later Platonists are said to have raised up as a rival to our Lord,—all these have been examined by men of learning and judgment; and the most zealous friend of Christianity could not wish for a more favourable display of the unexceptionable testimony upon which its miracles are received, than is obtained by contrasting it with the air of falsehood which runs through all these accounts.

Mr. Hume has been solicitous to place the evidence of some popish miracles in the most advantageous light, and he has collected, with an air of triumph, various circumstances which conspired to attest the miracles said to be performed about the beginning of the last century, in the church-yard of St. Medard, at the tomb of Abbé Paris. But although a particular purpose induced him to assume the appearance of an advocate for these miracles, yet the imposture was manifest at the time to many who

lived upon the spot, and it has since that time been completely exposed in several treatises. In Campbell's Dissertation, in the Criterion by Dr. Douglas late bishop of Salisbury, in Macknight's Truth of the Gospel History, and in other books, there is an investigation of many pretended miracles; and I believe it will be acknowledged, without hesitation, that Dr. Campbell and Dr. Douglas have clearly shown, with regard to all the miracles to which their investigation extends, either that the accounts of them, from the circumstances, appear to be false, or that the facts, from their nature, are not miraculous. I am inclined to think that, as far as this investigation can be carried, it will be found uniformly to apply to the miracles recorded in heathen story, or in popish legends; and that, as a person who has been accustomed to read much history and much fable, is at no loss to distinguish the one from the other when they are presented to him, so any one who duly considers the circumstances of the case, will most readily discriminate the precise assured testimony of miracles wrought by Jesus as a divine teacher, which eye-witnesses submitted at the very time and place to the examination of their enemies, from the hesitating, suspicious record of wonders said to be performed for some insignificant purpose, which the historians did not see, or which the rank and characters of the person to whom they are ascribed, preserved from the scrutiny even of those who saw them. The evidence of the miracles of the Gospel, far from being diminished by the number of impostures, is very much illustrated by this contrast. Men, indeed, cannot perceive the difference without an exercise of understanding. They are required

here, as upon every other subject, to separate truth from falsehood, to “prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good.”* Extensive information and enlightened criticism are called in to be the handmaids of religion; and the continued increase of human knowledge, instead of giving Christians any reasonable ground of apprehending danger, enables them to defend the principles which they have embraced, dissipates objections which might occur to the ignorant, and establishes the faith of those who inquire.

I said, I am inclined to think, that if the investigation of which Dr. Douglas and Dr. Campbell have given a specimen, were extended farther, it would be found to apply uniformly to the miracles recorded in heathen story or in popish legends. I used this guarded expression, because I do not consider any man as warranted to say, before he has examined them, that all apparent miracles, excepting those recorded in the Bible, may be accounted for by the dexterity of an impostor, or by the carelessness or ignorance of the spectators.

3. And, therefore, my third observation is, that although we should ascribe some of the extraordinary works recorded in history to the agency of evil spirits, the argument from miracles, for the truth of Christianity, is not impaired.

They who can satisfy their minds that such works are not miraculous, or that the accounts of them are false, leave the argument from miracles entire to Judaism and Christianity. They who cannot satisfy their minds in this manner, and who judge from the

* 1 Thess. v. 21.

nature of the works, or the purpose which they promote, that they did not proceed from God, are led by their principles to ascribe them to some intermediate beings between God and man. But this system, as we have been taught by our Lord to reason,* does not affect the argument from miracles. For thus stands the case : The orders of intermediate beings are wholly unknown to human reason. There may be good, and there may be bad spirits, and their measure of power may be more, or it may be less. But as we infer from all the appearances of nature, and especially from the constitution of our own minds, that this world is not the work of an evil being, so having found that the nature of the revelation contained in the New Testament affords a very strong presumption of its coming from God, we cannot suppose that the miracles, which are the direct proof of this presumption, and which actually were the means of establishing the Gospel, came from an evil being. The conduct of the adversary of mankind was indeed very opposite to the cunning which is ascribed to him, if he gave his sanction to the man who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and employed his power to undermine his own kingdom, and put an end to his own malicious joy. As far, then, as the argument from miracles for the truth of Christianity is concerned, the power of evil spirits is merely a speculative point, upon which, as upon many other speculative points concerning which our information is imperfect, different opinions may be held without any injury to the truth. Whatever system we adopt with regard to the

* Matt. chap. xii.

power of Satan, howsoever evil spirits may be supposed to have acted at other times, we are as certain as the nature of the thing can make us, that their power was not exerted in the establishment of our faith, and we rest in the miracles of Jesus as wrought by the finger of God.

But, although speculations concerning the power of evil spirits are in no degree necessary to a rational belief of Christianity, yet they will naturally fall in your way, when you are investigating the argument from miracles, and you ought not to be strangers to the grounds upon which the different opinions rest. It has been said, that God alone can work miracles, because the sovereign of the universe never will permit any evil spirit to encroach so far upon the prerogative of his majesty, as to produce any work contrary to the order of nature. This opinion seems to present the most honourable view of the Almighty; it professes to afford security against many delusions, which, according to other systems, are practicable; it leaves the argument from miracles clear and unembarrassed, and it has been supported by much ingenious reasoning. But it appears to me presumptuous, because it assumes more, and pronounces with a more decisive tone concerning the conduct of the divine government, than is competent to our ignorance. It contradicts the obvious interpretation of several passages of scripture, and the attempts to give those passages a meaning not inconsistent with it, have tortured scripture in a manner which is not justifiable. It has been said, on the other hand, that evil spirits have been accustomed, in all ages, to exercise their power in astonishing, deluding, and misleading the minds of men; that

all false religions have been supported by their influence, and that they are continually busied in corrupting true religion. Even the able and profound Cudworth represents it as unquestionable, that Apollonius of Tyana was made choice of by the policy, and assisted by the powers of the kingdom of darkness, for the doing some things extraordinary, in order to derogate from the miracles of our Saviour, and enable Paganism to bear up against the attacks of Christianity. When the matter is thus stated, a most uncomfortable view of the moral state of the universe is presented to us ; a view which, without some qualification, approaches very near to the Manichæan system, by subjecting the feeble race of man, in their most important concerns, alternately to the dominion of opposite powers. The safe opinion upon this subject appears to me to lie in the middle between these two. We cannot pretend to say that an intermediate being never is allowed to suspend the laws of nature. But, we are certain, that all power is dependent upon the Lord of nature. We should be careful not to bewilder ourselves, by carrying the ideas suggested by the weakness of human government into our speculations concerning the ways of God ; and, we should always remember, that, in the administration of Him, whose eyes are in every place, there can be no delay or opposition to his purpose from the multitude of his ministers. “ He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven.” God is all in all. The power of working miracles may descend from the Almighty through a gradation of good spirits ; and he may commission evil spirits, by exercising the power given to them, to prove his people, or to execute a judicial sentence upon those who receive not

the love of the truth. But both good and evil spirits are absolutely under his control ; they fulfil his pleasure, and he works by them.

This is the system which appears to be intimated in Scripture, as far as the Spirit of God hath seen meet to reveal a speculative point which is not essential to our improvement or comfort. It is indeed very remarkable, that at the introduction of both the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, there seems, according to the most natural interpretation of Scripture, to have been a certain display of the power of evil spirits—I mean in the works of the Egyptian magicians, and in the demoniacs of the New Testament. But in both cases the display appears to have been permitted by God, that it might be made manifest there was in nature a superior power. The magicians, after they had imitated some of the works of Moses, could go no farther, but said “ This is the finger of God ;” and therefore God says to Pharaoh, “ For this cause have I raised thee up for to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.” * The evil spirits which had afflicted the bodies of men, owned, in like manner, the power of Jesus, and retired at his command. Therefore, he says, “ I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven ;” and again, “ If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come to you.” † Both dispensations give warning of false prophets who should show signs. Moses says, “ If there arise among you a prophet and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, saying, let us go after other gods, thou shalt not hearken unto the

* Exod. viii. 19 ; ix. 16.

† Luke x. 18 ; xi. 20.

words of that prophet, for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love him with all your soul." * Our Lord says, " There shall arise false christs, and shall show great signs and wonders;" † and, it is part of the description which his Apostle gives of Antichrist, " His coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders." ‡ Even although you suppose it to be meant by these warnings, that the signs and wonders were to be performed with the assistance of evil spirits, still the miracles upon which the two dispensations are founded, afford a clear demonstration of the supremacy of their Author; and if evil spirits had permission given them to exercise a certain power at those times, it was only to prepare for the destruction of their power.

In the very constitution of the evidence of the two religions, provision is made for preserving the true disciples from the dread of evil spirits. Whatever opinions may have been entertained concerning their power, they manifestly stand forth in the Bible, confessing their inferiority, and furnishing by this confession, to all whose understandings are sound, and whose hearts are upright, a perpetual antidote against the fears of superstition.

It appears, then, that the system which ascribes many of the miracles recorded in history to the agency of evil spirits, does not detract from the evidence of Christianity, because our faith rests upon works whose distinguishing character, and whose manifest superiority to the power of evil spirits, are calculated

* Deut. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

† Matt. xxiv. 24.

‡ 2 Thess. 2, 9.

to remove every degree of hesitation in applying the argument which miracles afford.

One observation more shuts up the subject.

4. The uncertainty with regard to the duration of miracles in the Christian Church, does not invalidate the argument arising from the miracles of Jesus and his apostles.

All Protestants, and many Catholics, believe, that the claim of working miracles which the Church of Rome advances as one mark of her being the true Church, is without foundation; and no impartial discerning person, who reads the history of the wonders which for many centuries have been recorded by that Church, can hesitate a moment in classing them with the tricks of heathen priests. Dr. Middleton, in his letter from Rome, has shown that many of the Popish are an imitation of the heathen miracles, and even those who do not admit that they have been borrowed, cannot deny the resemblance. On the other hand, every Christian believes, that real miracles were performed in the days of the Apostles; and the unanimous tradition of the Christian Church has preserved the memory of many in succeeding ages. It is natural then to inquire at what period the true miracles ceased, and the fictitious commenced. Some mark is called for, to distinguish so important an era, and the imprudence of which some Christian writers have been guilty in their attempts to fix it, has afforded a kind of triumph to those who were willing to expose every weak quarter in the defence of Christianity. Dr. Middleton, in his book, entitled—*A free Inquiry into the miraculous powers which have been supposed to subsist in the Christian Church*, maintained this position, that after the

days of the Apostles, the Church did not possess any standing power of working miracles. Those who were zealous for the honour of the early fathers, attacked, with much bitterness, a position which directly impugned their authority. Some of them very unadvisedly said, that if all the miracles, after the days of the Apostles, which were attested unanimously by the primitive fathers, are no better than enthusiasm and imposture, then we are deprived of our evidence for the truth of the Gospel miracles. Others undertook to defend the reality of the miracles in the first four centuries; and they weakened their defence by extending their frontier. The controversy was keenly agitated about the middle of the last century; and the attention of the world was lately drawn to it, by the fascinating language of Mr. Gibbon, who, mixing truth and falsehood together, and colouring both with his masterly pencil, has contrived to reflect from the claims of the primitive Church, a degree of suspicion upon the Gospel miracles.

No person who believes the Gospel will think it incredible, that miracles were performed during the whole of the first century, because the Apostle John lived about the end of it, and many of those to whom the Apostles had communicated spiritual gifts, probably survived it. All the Christian writers of the second and third centuries affirm, that miraculous gifts did, in certain measure, continue in the Christian Church, and were, at times, exerted in the cure of diseases, and the expulsion of demons. But those who have examined their writings with critical accuracy, have shown that there is much looseness and exaggeration in the language which Mr. Gibbon

has employed with regard to these gifts. To satisfy you of this, I shall place a passage from that historian, over against passages from Irenæus, Origen, and Eusebius. Mr. Gibbon says, the Christian Church, from the times of the Apostles and their first disciples, has claimed an uninterrupted succession of miraculous powers. Amongst these he mentions the power of raising the dead. In the days of Irenæus, he affirms, about the end of the second century, the resurrection of the dead was far from being esteemed an uncommon event; the miracle was frequently performed on necessary occasions, by great fasting and the joint supplications of the church of the place, and the persons thus restored to their prayers, lived afterwards among them many years.* Now hear Irenæus himself. The true disciples of Jesus, by a power derived from him, confer blessings upon other men, as each has been enabled. Some expel demons so effectually, that they who have been delivered from evil spirits, believe and become members of the church; others have knowledge of futurity, see visions, and utter prophecies; others cure diseases by the imposition of hands; and, as we have said, the dead too have been raised, and remained some years with us.† Observe he changes the tense in the last clause; it is *ἡγεσθῆσαν, παρεμειναν*. He does not speak of the power of raising the dead as present, but as having been exerted in some time past, so that the persons who were the objects of it reached to his own days. Mr. Gibbon himself has shown that the Bishop of Antioch did not know, in

* Gibbon's Rom. Hist. ch. 15.

† Iren. lib. ii. cap. 32.

the second century, that the power of raising the dead existed in the Christian church; and no Christian writer, in the second or third century, mentions this miracle as performed in his time. You may judge from this specimen of the accuracy of Mr. Gibbon. Origen says, in the third century, signs of the Holy Spirit were shown where Jesus began to teach, more numerous after his ascension; and, in succeeding times, less numerous. But even at this day, there are traces of it in a few men who have had their souls cleansed.* Eusebius, in the beginning of the fourth century, says, Our Lord himself, even at this day, is wont to manifest some small portions of his power in those whom he judges proper for it.† If you give credit to these respectable testimonies, and they are entitled to respect both from the manner in which they are given, and from the characters of the authors, you will believe that the profusion of miraculous gifts which was poured forth in the days of the Apostles was gradually withdrawn in the succeeding ages, and that the fathers were sensible of this gradual cessation, but boasted that some gifts did continue, and were occasionally exerted during the first three centuries. This gradual cessation is agreeable to the analogy of the divine procedure in other matters. It left an occasional support to the faith of Christians, so long as they were exposed to persecution under the heathen emperors; and it serves to account for what Mr. Gibbon calls the insensibility of the Christians with regard to the cessation of miraculous powers. If these powers were

* Orig. contra Cels. lib. vii. p. 337.

† Eus. Dem. Ev. lib. iii. p. 109.

withdrawn, one by one, and the display of them became gradually less frequent, the insensibility of Christians with regard to the cessation of miracles is not wonderful ; and the writers whom I have quoted, have spoken of the subject in that manner which was most natural.

Although it seems probable that miraculous powers did, in certain measure, continue in the Christian church during the first three centuries, yet it cannot be said that the testimony borne to all the miracles of that period, is unsuspecting. There probably was much credulity and inattention in the relaters, and their reports are destitute of many of those circumstances which are found in the testimony of the Apostles. But, it is always to be remembered, that the two are independent of one another. We do not receive the miracles of the Gospel upon the testimony of the fathers ; and, although all the miracles said to be wrought after the days of the Apostles be rejected, the evidence of the works which Jesus and his Apostles did, would rest exactly upon that footing on which we placed it.

It was to be expected, that miraculous gifts which had perceptibly decreased till the days of Constantine, would cease entirely when the protection afforded by the civil government to the Christians rendered them less necessary. Yet we find ecclesiastical history, after Christianity became the religion of the state, abounding with a diversity of the greatest miracles. No wise champion of Christianity will attempt to defend the reality of these wonders ; at the same time, the extravagance of the later fictions will not discredit, with any wise inquirer, the miracles of former times. It is obvious to observe, that the Christian

world was prepared by having been witnesses of real miracles, for receiving without suspicion such as were fictitious, that the effect, which true miracles had produced, might induce vain or deceitful men to employ this engine in accomplishing their own purposes, and that after Christianity was the established religion, the use of this engine became as easy to the Christians, as it was to the heathen priests of old. The innumerable forgeries of this sort, says Dr. Middleton, strengthen the credibility of the Jewish and Christian miracles. For how could we account for a practice so universal, of forging miracles for the support of false religions, if on some occasions they had not actually been wrought for the confirmation of a true one? Or how is it possible that so many spurious copies should pass upon the world, without some genuine original from whence they were drawn, whose known existence and tried success might give an appearance of probability to the counterfeit? We may add, that if these counterfeits were at any time detected, the strong prejudice which would arise from the detection against that religion, in support of which they were adduced, could be counterbalanced only by the unquestionable evidence of the miracles of former times.

It appears then, that the duration of miracles in the Christian church is a question of curiosity in no degree essential to the evidence of our religion. If no miracles were really performed after the days of the apostles, then every Christian receives all that ever were wrought upon unquestionable testimony. If there were some real miracles in aftertimes, they must stand upon their own evidence. We may receive them, or reject them, as they appear to us well

or ill vouched ; and we can draw no inference, from the multiplicity of imitations or forgeries, unfavourable to the truth and divinity of the original.

Bonnet, in his philosophical and critical inquiries concerning Christianity, has given, besides much other valuable matter, the most satisfying statement that I have met with of the argument from miracles. Bonnet's work was written in French. An extract of the part of it most interesting to a student in divinity, was translated by a clergyman of this church, and published some years ago.

Bishop Sherlock, in his first volume of sermons, which is chiefly occupied in stating the superiority of revealed to natural religion, has two discourses, the ninth and tenth, upon miracles considered as the proof of revelation. He treats the subject in his usual luminous manner, and suggests many just and useful views.

Newcome, in his observations on the conduct of our Saviour, has written largely and delightfully of his miracles.

Jortin also, in some of his essays or discourses, and in his remarks on ecclesiastical history, has very ably illustrated the fitness with which our Lord's miracles were adapted both to prove the truth of his religion, and to impress upon his followers the characteristical doctrines of the gospel. This view of the subject is also prosecuted by Ogden in his sermons.

Campbell's Dissertation on Miracles.

Douglas's Criterion.

Butler's Analogy.

Macknight's Truth of the Gospel History.

Paley's Evidences.

Farmer on Miracles.

Cudworth, translated by Mosheim.

Leland's View of Deistical Writers.

Randolph's View of our Lord's Ministry.

Clarke.

Bullock.

Boyle's Lectures.

Middleton.

Sir David Dalrymple.

CHAP. V.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

THOSE lectures upon Scripture are properly called critical, which are intended to elucidate the meaning of a difficult passage, and to bring out from the words of an author the sense which is not obvious to an ordinary reader. The sources of this elucidation are, such emendations upon the reading or the punctuation as may warrantably be made, an analysis of the particular words, a close attention to the manner of the author, to the scope of his reasoning, and to the circumstances of those for whom he writes; and, lastly, a comparison of the passage, which is the subject of the criticism, with other passages in which the same matters are treated. There is great room for critical lectures of this kind, and my theological course abounds with specimens of them. Much has been done in this way since the beginning of the last century, by the application of sound criticism to the Holy Scriptures; and one great advantage to be derived from an intimate acquaintance with the learned languages, and from the habit of analysing the authors who wrote in them, is, that you are thereby prepared for receiving that rational exposition of the word of God, which is the true foundation of theological knowledge.

There is another kind of critical lecture, which professes by a general comprehensive view of a passage of scripture, to illustrate some important points in the evidence or genius of our religion. This kind of lecture is applicable to those passages where there is not any obscurity in the expression, any recondite meaning, or any controverted doctrine, but where there is a number of circumstances scattered throughout, the force of which may be missed by a careless or ignorant reader, but which by being arranged and placed clearly in view, may be made to bear upon one point, so as to bring conviction to the understanding, at the same time that they minister to the improvement of the heart. The inimitable manner of Scripture, so natural and artless, yet so pregnant with circumstances the most delicate and the most instructive, affords numberless subjects of this kind of lecture; and I do not know any method so well calculated to give a person of taste and sensibility a deep impression of the excellency and the divinity of the Scriptures. One is tempted by the peculiar fitness of the passages which occur to him, to adopt this mode of lecturing occasionally in speaking to an assembly of Christians, although it cannot be denied that the ordinary method of lecturing by suggesting remarks from particular verses, is more adapted to that measure of understanding, of attention, and of memory, which is found in the generality of hearers.

But such a mode may here be followed with advantage; and I am led to give you now a specimen of this criticism upon the sense, rather than upon the words of an evangelist, because the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel may be stated in such a light as to illustrate much of what has been said with regard

both to the internal evidence of Christianity, and to that branch of the external evidence which arises from miracles.

The eleventh chapter of John is the history of the resurrection of Lazarus, the greatest miracle which Jesus performed. Upon such a general view of the chapter as a critical lecture of this kind is meant to give, we are led to attend to that exhibition of character which the chapter contains—to the nature and circumstances of the miracle—and to the effects which the miracle produced.

I. The exhibition of character which this chapter contains is various, and our attention is directed to several very pleasing objects.

It is natural to speak first of the exhibition given of the character of the historian. The other evangelists have not mentioned this miracle, perhaps out of delicacy to Lazarus, who was alive when they wrote. They did not choose to expose the friend of their master to the fury of the Jews, by holding him forth in writings that were to go through the world, as a monument of his power. But John, who lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem, probably survived Lazarus; and there was every reason why this evangelist, who has preserved other miracles and discourses which the former historians had omitted, should record this event. It is a subject suited to the pen of John: the beloved disciple seems to delight in spreading it out; for he has coloured his narration with many beautiful circumstances, which unfold the characters of the other persons, and discover his intimate acquaintance with his master's heart. It is a striking instance of that strict propriety which per-

vades all the books of the New Testament, and which marks them to every discerning eye to be authentic writings, that the tenderest scenes in our Lord's life, those in which the warmth of his private affections is conspicuous, are recorded by this evangelist. From the others we learn his public life, the grace, the condescension, the benevolence which appeared in all his intercourse with those that had access to him. It was reserved to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" to present to succeeding ages this divine person in his family, and amongst his friends. In his Gospel, we see Jesus washing the feet of his disciples at the last supper that he ate with them. It is John, the disciple that leaned on the bosom of Jesus while he sat at meat, who relates the long discourse in which, with the most delicate sensibility for their condition, he soothes the troubled heart of his disciples, spares their feelings, while he tells them the truth, and gives them his parting blessing. It is John, whom Jesus judged worthy of the charge, who records the filial piety with which, in the hour of his agony, he provided for the comfort of his mother; and it is John, whose soul was congenial to that of his Master, tender, affectionate, and feeling like his, who dwells upon all the particulars of the resurrection of Lazarus, brings forward to our view the sympathy and attention with which Jesus took part in the sorrows of those whom he loved, and making us intimately acquainted with them and with him, presents a picture at once delightful and instructive.

The next object in this exhibition of character is the friendship which Jesus entertained for the family of Lazarus. Bethany was a small village upon the mount of Olives, within two miles of Jerusalem,

in the road from Galilee. Jesus, who resided in Galilee, and went only occasionally to Jerusalem, was accustomed to lodge with Lazarus in his way to the public festivals: and we are led to suppose, from an incidental expression in Luke, * that during the festivals he went out to Bethany in the evening, and returned to Jerusalem in the morning. To this little family he retired from the fatigues of his busy life, from the disputations of the Jewish doctors, and the bitterness of his enemies; and being, like his brethren, compassed with infirmity, like his brethren also he found refreshment to his soul in the intercourse of those whom he loved. "Now Jesus," says John, "loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." He loved the world; he loved the chief of sinners. That was a love of pity, the compassion which a superior being feels for the wretched. This was the love of kindness, the complacency which kindred spirits take in the society of one another. Of the brother he says to his apostles, with the same cordiality with which you would speak of one like yourselves, "Our friend Lazarus." And although we shall find the character of the two sisters widely different, yet he discerned in both a mind worthy of his friendship.

It appears strange to me, that any person who ever read this chapter can blame the Gospel, as some deistical writers in the last century were accustomed to do, for not recommending private friendship. Can there be a stronger recommendation than this picture of the Author of the Gospel, drawn by the hand of his beloved disciple? When you follow Je-

* Luke xxi. 37, 38.

sus to Jerusalem, you may learn from his public life, fortitude, diligence, wisdom. When you retire with him to Bethany, you may learn tenderness, confidence, and fellow feeling, with those whom you choose as your friends. The servants of Jesus may not in every situation find persons so worthy of their friendship as this family ; and there is neither duty nor satisfaction in making an improper choice. Many circumstances may appoint for individuals days of solitude, and therefore the universal religion of Jesus has wisely refrained from delivering a precept which it may often be impossible to obey. But they who are able to follow the example of their master, by having a heart formed for friendship, and by meeting with those who are worthy of it, have found the medicine of life. Their happiness is independent of noise, and dissipation, and show ; amidst the tumult of the world, their spirits enter into rest ; and in the quiet, pleasing, rational intercourse of Bethany, they forget the strife of Jerusalem.

The next object in this exhibition is the character of the two sisters, painted in that most perfect and natural manner, which the Scriptures almost always adopt, by actions, not by words. As soon as Lazarus is sick, the two sisters send a message to Jesus, with entire confidence in his power to heal, and his willingness to come. He is now beyond Jordan ; the countries of Samaria and Galilee lie between Bethany and his present abode. But the sisters of Lazarus knew too well his affection for their brother, and his readiness to do good, to think that distance would prevent his coming. They say no more than, “ He whom thou lovest is sick,” and they leave Jesus to interpret their wish. When Jesus

arrives at Bethany, after the death of Lazarus, the different characters of the two sisters are supported with the most delicate discrimination, even under that pressure of grief which, in the hand of a coarse painter, would have obliterated every distinguishing feature. Martha, who had been "cumbered with much serving," when she had to entertain our Lord, rises with the same officious zeal from the ground, where she was sitting dishevelled and in sackcloth, amongst the friends who had come to comfort her. She rises the moment she hears by some chance messenger that Jesus is at hand, and runs to meet him. Mary, who had sat at the feet of Jesus, so much engaged with his discourse as not to think of providing for his entertainment, is incapable of so brisk an exertion, or thinks it more respectful to Jesus to wait his coming. This difference in the conduct of the two sisters is in the style of nature, according to which the particular temper, and feelings of particular persons, give a very great variety to the language of passion upon occasions equally interesting to all of them. A man may know, he ought to know, every corner in his own heart, how far any part of his conduct proceeds from the defect of good, or the prevalence of wrong principles. But the most intimate acquaintance does not give him access to know all the notions of delicacy and propriety which may restrain, or urge on others at particular seasons, and may give to their conduct, in the eye of careless observers, a very different appearance from that which they would wish; and it argues both an uncandid spirit, and very little knowledge of the world, to say or to think this man does not feel as he ought, because he does not express his feelings as I would

express mine. Martha ran and met Jesus: Mary sat still in the house. When Martha comes to Jesus, there is in her first words a mixture of reproach for his delay, and of confidence in his kindness, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." A gleam of hope, indeed, shoots athwart the sorrowful mind of Martha at the sight of Jesus. But her wish was so great that she is afraid to mention it. "I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She has conceived a hope, in the state of her mind it was a wild hope, that her brother whom she had lost might be instantly restored. Jesus composes her spirit, prepares her for this gift, by recalling her thoughts from the general resurrection to himself, and probably gives her some sign or some direction, in consequence of which she goes to the house, and without alarming the Jews who were assembled there, says secretly to her sister, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." This message instantly rouses Mary. Her spirit, bowed down with grief, revives at his call, and without knowing, probably without conceiving the purpose for which he called her, she arose quickly and went to him. When she arrives, there is more submission in her manner than there had been in that of Martha. The marks are stronger of a depressed and afflicted spirit. She fell down at his feet, weeping. But, as if to remind us that we should look beyond these outward expressions, which, being very much a matter of constitution, vary exceedingly in different persons, the evangelist puts the same words into the mouth of both, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died;" and whatever interpretation we give to these words

when they are spoken by the one sister, we cannot avoid giving them the same when they are spoken by the other. In this exhibition of the manner of the two sisters there is so much of nature, and of nature appearing strongly in minute circumstances, as to be far superior to that truth of painting which we admire in a fancied picture, and to carry with it an internal evidence that John was a witness of what he describes, and that his drawing is part of a scene which, from the powerful, yet different emotions of the two sisters, had made a deep impression upon his feeling breast.

The next object which presents itself in this moral exhibition, is the character of the Apostles. The Gospels present us with the most natural picture of the Apostles ; their doubts, their fears, their slowness of apprehension and of belief. By circumstances that seem to be incidentally recorded, we see them feeling and acting, not indeed in the manner which would have occurred to a rude, unskilful hand, had he attempted to draw those who were honoured with being the companions of Jesus, but in the manner which any one intimately acquainted with the human heart will perceive to be the most natural for men of their condition and education, and situated as they were. We see them differing from one another in sentiments and conduct, with the same kind of variety which is observable amongst our neighbours and companions, each preserving in every situation his peculiar character, and all at the same time uniting in attachment to their master.

Although the companions of Jesus were interested in the fate of his friend Lazarus, yet they did not understand the hints which our Lord gave them.

Although sleep is one of the most common images of death, they suppose when Jesus says, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," that he was enjoying a refreshing sleep, by which nature was to work his cure; and not attending to the impropriety of Jesus going a long way to awake him out of such a sleep, they say, "Lord, if he sleep he shall do well." When Jesus tells them plainly "Lazarus is dead," Thomas stands forth, and by one expression presents to us the same character which is more fully unfolded in another chapter of this Gospel.*

All the disciples were filled with sorrow and despair, when they saw their Master condemned, executed, and laid in the tomb. "For as yet," says John, "they knew not the Scripture that he must rise again from the dead." At length, "Jesus came and stood in the midst of them." "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." It happened that Thomas was not present. And when "the other disciples had said to him, we have seen the Lord," his answer was, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." About eight days after, Jesus condescended to give him this proof. "Reach hither," said he, "thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing. And Thomas answered and said, My Lord and my God." He had felt doubts, but his heart appears full of affection and reverence. Now, mark here the same Thomas. The disciples were alarmed at

* John xx. 9, 19, 20, 24—28.

the danger of going back to Judea. They had tried to dissuade their Master, but they find him fixed in his purpose. "Lazarus is dead, nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas unto his fellow-disciples, let us also go, that we may die with him." You see here the same warmth of temper, the same firm determined mind which appeared at the other time, but you see also the same defect of faith. Thomas does not think it possible that Jesus could shelter himself from the Jews. He does not see any purpose that could be served by the journey. He thinks Jesus is going to throw away his life. Yet he resolves himself, and he encourages his fellow-disciples not to part with him. Our Master makes a sacrifice of his life. We have forsaken all and followed him. Let us follow him also in this journey; "let us go that we may die with him." It is the strong effort of a mind which loved and venerated Jesus, yet distrusted and did not know his divine power: Thomas faithless, yet affectionate and manly.

Such is the mixture of character which we often meet with in common life. They who are most intimately acquainted with the workings of the human heart, and who have observed most accurately the manners of those around them, will best perceive the truth of that picture which the Evangelists have drawn of themselves, and they will be struck with the force of that internal evidence for the Gospel history which arises from this simple natural record. We cannot attend to this picture without recollecting the divine power which, out of these feeble doubting men, raised the most successful instruments of spreading the religion of Jesus. There

was no want of faith after the day of Pentecost. Thomas was one of that company which was assembled, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost ; and he who now says, “ Let us go and die with Jesus,” with power gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord.*

The principal object in this moral exhibition yet remains. It is Jesus himself. The striking feature throughout the whole is tenderness and love. But we discern also prudence, fortitude, and dignity ; and this chapter may thus serve as a specimen of that most perfect and most difficult character, which the Apostles were incapable of conceiving, and which, had they conceived it, they would have been unable to support in every situation with such exact propriety, if they had not drawn it from the life.

After he receives the message from the sisters, he relieves himself from the importunity of his disciples, by an assurance which was sufficient to remove their anxiety, and he lingers for two days in the place where he was. The purpose of his lingering was, that Lazarus might be truly dead, that he might not merely recover a man who was sick, but that he might raise a man who had been in the grave. But this lingering did not proceed from indifference. Mark how beautifully the fifth verse is thrown in between the assurance given to the disciples, and the resolution to delay. He loved the family. He entered into their sorrows. His sympathy for them, indeed, yields to his prosecution of the great purpose for which he came, yet his love is not the less for delay. How tender and how soothing ! The merci-

* Acts iv. 31, 33.

ful High Priest, to whom Christians still send their requests, is not forgetful, although he does not instantly grant them. He loves and pities his own. But he does not think their time always the best. His own time for showing favour is set. No intervening circumstance can prevent its coming; and when it arrives, they themselves will acknowledge that it has been well chosen, and all their sorrow will be forgotten and overpaid by the joy which is brought to their souls. One of the finest moral lessons is conveyed by this delay of Jesus. It is pleasing to act from kindness, compassion, and love. But the excess of good affections may sometimes mislead us; and there are considerations of prudence, of fidelity, and justice, which may give to the conduct of the most tender-hearted man an appearance of coldness and severity. The world may judge hastily in such instances. But let every man be satisfied in his own mind, first, that he has good affections; and next, that the considerations which sometimes restrain the exercise of them, are such that he need not be ashamed of their influence.

It is strongly marked in this moral picture, that the delay of Jesus, although dictated by prudence, did not proceed from any consideration of his personal safety. For, when the disciples represented the danger of retiring to Judea, his answer is, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." His meaning is explained by other similar expressions. The Jews divided the day both in summer and winter into twelve hours, so that an hour with them

marked, not as with us, a certain portion of time, but the twelfth part of a day, longer in summer, and shorter in winter. The time of his life upon earth was the day of Jesus, during which he had to finish the work given him to do. While this day continued, none of his enemies had power to take away his life, and he had nothing to fear in fulfilling the commandment of God. When this day ended, his work ended also ; he fell indeed into the hands of his enemies ; but he was ready to be offered up. And thus in the same picture Jesus is exhibited as gentle, feeling, compassionate to his friends, undaunted in the face of his enemies, assiduous and fearless in working the work of Him that sent him. There shines throughout the whole of this picture a dignity of manner ; no indecent haste ; no distrust of his own power ; a delay, which rendered one work more difficult, yet which is not employed in preparing for an uncommon exertion. “ Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.” He wishes to give his disciples a more striking manifestation of his divine power ; and the display is made for their sakes, not for his own. With what awful solemnity does he unfold to Martha his exalted character in these words : “ I am the resurrection and the life ; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die ;” and how suitably to the authority implied in that character does he require from Martha a confession of her faith in him ! Yet how easily does he descend from this dignity to mingle his tears with those of his friends. “ When he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he

groaned in the spirit, and was troubled :” and as they led him to the sepulchre, “ Jesus wept.” How amiable a picture of the Saviour of the world ! He found upon earth an hospital full of the sound of lamentation, a dormitory in which some are every day falling asleep, and they who remain are mourning over those who to them are not. He hath brought a cordial to revive our spirits, while we are bearing our portion of this general sorrow, and he hath opened to our view a land of rest. But even while he is executing his gracious purpose, his heart is melted with the sight of that distress which he came to relieve, and although he was able to destroy the king of terrors, he was troubled when he beheld in the company of mourners a monument of his power. We do not read that Jesus ever shed tears for his own sufferings. When he was going to the cross, he turned round and said, “ Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me.” But he wept over Jerusalem when he thought of the destruction that was coming upon it ; * and here the anguish of his friends draws from him groans and tears. He was soon to remove their anguish. But it was not the less bitter during its continuance ; and it is the present distress of his friends into which his heart enters thus readily.

Let the false pride of philosophy place the perfection of the human character in an equality of mind, unmoved by the events that befall ourselves or others. But Christians may learn from the example of him who was made like his brethren, that the variety in the events of life was intended by the author of nature as an exercise of feeling ; that it is no part of

* Luke xxiii. 28 ; xix. 41.

our duty to harden our heart against the impressions which they make, and that we need not be ashamed of expressing what we feel. That God, who chastens his children, loves a heart which is tender before him ; and Jesus, who wept himself, commands us to weep with them that weep. The tears shed are both a tribute to the dead, and an amiable display of the heart of the living, and they interest every spectator in the persons from whom they flow.

Thus have we seen in this moral picture of the character of Jesus, tenderness, compassion, prudence, fortitude, dignity, “ Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God,”* the strength of an almighty arm displayed by a man like his brethren, “ the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”† The assemblage of qualities is so uncommon, and the harmony with which they are blended so entire, that they convey to every intelligent reader an impression of the divinity of our religion, and we cannot contemplate this picture without feeling the sentiment which was afterwards expressed by the Centurion who stood over against the cross of Jesus : “ Truly this was the Son of God.”‡

II. Circumstances of the miracle.

Mr. Hume and other philosophers, both before and after his time, have denied the conclusiveness of the general argument from miracles, or they have endeavoured to destroy that evidence from testimony upon which we give credit to the works recorded in the Gospel. But there is a set of minute writers in the deistical controversy, who have adopted a style

* 1 Cor. i. 24.

† John i. 14.

‡ Matt. xxvii. 54.

of philological or verbal objections, which would set aside the truth of the record, not by any general reasoning, but by supposed instances of inaccuracy or impropriety in particular narrations. This style of objections enters into ordinary conversation; it is level to the understanding of many, who are incapable of apprehending a general argument; and it is the usual refuge of those who have nothing else to oppose to the evidences of the Christian religion.

You will find objections of this kind occasionally thrown out in many deistical writers. But they were formed into a sort of system in a treatise published about sixty years ago, by Mr. Woolston, and entitled, "Discourses upon the Miracles of our Saviour," a book now very little known, but which drew great attention at the time, and was overpowered by a variety of able answers. Mr. Woolston attempted to show that the earliest and most respectable writers of the Christian church understood the miracles of our Saviour purely in an allegorical sense, as emblems of the spiritual life; and that there was good reason for doing so, because the accounts, taken in a literal sense, are absurd and incredible. He has been convicted by those who have answered him, of gross disingenuity in maintaining the first of his positions. It is true that the fathers, even of the first century, were led by their attachment to that philosophy in which they had been educated, to seek for hidden spiritual meanings in the plain historical parts of Scripture. And Origen, in the third century, went so far as to undervalue the literal sense in comparison with the allegorical, saying, "the Scriptures are of little use to those who understand them as they

are written.” * He has pursued this manner of interpreting the miracles of our Saviour much farther than became a sound reasoner. But although it appeared to him more sublime and instructive than a simple exposition of the facts recorded, yet it proceeds upon a supposition of the truth of the facts ; and accordingly in his valuable work against Celsus the Jew, where he answers the objections to the truth of Christianity, and states with great force of reason the arguments upon which our faith rests, he appeals repeatedly to the miracles which Jesus did, which he enabled his apostles to do, and some faint traces of which remained in the days of Origen. He says that the miracles of Christ converted nations, and that it would have been absurd in the apostles to have attempted the introduction of a new religion without the help of miracles. Mr. Woolston, therefore, is left without the support of that authority which he pleads ; for Origen, the most allegorical of the fathers, even where he prefers the allegorical, does not exclude the literal sense ; and his argumentative discourse proceeds upon the acknowledged truth of the facts recorded.

The second position does not profess to rest upon the authority of any name, but upon the nature of the narration, which, Mr. Woolston says, is so filled with monstrous incredibilities and absurdities, that the best way in which any person can defend it, is by having recourse to the allegorical sense. But, in this way, the argument from miracles is totally lost, because, if we regard them not as facts, but as a method of conveying spiritual instruction, the ap-

* Origen, *Stromata*, lib. x.

peal which Jesus continually made to the works that he did, must appear to us chimerical or false. Although, therefore, Mr. Woolston has the effrontery to pretend a zeal for the honour of Jesus, in his attempts to get rid of the difficulties arising from the literal sense, that literal sense must be defended by every Christian.

It is impossible to lead you through all the objections which have been made by Woolston and other writers. But I shall point out the sources from whence satisfying answers may be drawn, and give some specimens of the application of these sources.

The sources of answers are three : An intimate acquaintance with local manners, customs, and prejudices—an analysis of the true meaning of the words in the original—and a close attention to the whole contexture of the narration.

1. An intimate acquaintance with local manners, customs, and prejudices. One of the most satisfying evidences of the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, arises from their reference to the peculiarities of that country in which we say the authors of them lived, a reference so exact, so uniform, and extending to such minuteness, as to afford conviction to any person who considers it properly, that these are not the production of a later age or another country. This continual reference, while it is a proof of their authenticity, colours every narration contained in them, with circumstances which appear strange to a reader who is not versant in Jewish antiquities ; and this strangeness furnishes many objections to those who are themselves ignorant, or who wish to impose upon the ignorance of others. But the phantom is dissipated by that local know-

ledge which may be easily acquired and easily applied.

2. An analysis of the words in the original. Particular objections against the miracles of Jesus are multiplied by this circumstance, that we read a narration of them, having a continual reference to ancient manners, not in the language in which it was originally written, but in a translation. For, allowing that translation all the praise that is due to it, and it deserves a great deal, still it must happen that the words in the translation do not always convey precisely the same meaning with those to which they correspond in the original. Different combinations of ideas, and different modes of phraseology diversify those words which answer the most exactly to one another in different languages; and although translations even under this disadvantage are sufficient to give every necessary information to those who are incapable of reading the original, yet we have experience, in reading all ancient authors, that the delicacy of a sentiment and the peculiar manner of an action may be so far lost by the words used in a translation, that there is no way of answering objections grounded upon the mode of exhibiting the sentiment or action, but by having recourse to the original.

3. A close attention to the whole contexture of the narration. Those who are forward to make objections, are not disposed to compare the different parts of the narration, because it is not their business to find an answer. They choose rather to lay hold of particular expressions, and to give them the most exceptionable form, by presenting them in a detailed view. The beautiful simplicity of Scripture leaves it very much exposed to this kind of objections.

When all the circumstances of a story are artfully arranged, so as to have a visible reference to one another, the manifest unfairness of attempting to present a part of the story disjointed from the rest, betrays the design of a person who makes such an attempt. But when the circumstances are spread carelessly through the whole narration, inserted by the historian as they occurred to his observation or his recollection, without his seeming desirous to prepossess the readers with an opinion that the story is true, or aware that any objection could be raised to it in this natural manner, which is the manner of truth and the manner of Scripture, it is easy to raise a variety of plausible objections; and a connected view of the whole is necessary in order to discern the futility of them.

From these three sources answers may be drawn to all the objections that have ever been made to the literal sense of the miracles of Jesus. To show their utility, I shall give a specimen of the application of them to some of the objections which Mr. Woolston has urged against three of the miracles of our Lord; the cure of the paralytic in the second chapter of Mark, the turning of water into wine at Cana, in the second chapter of John, and the resurrection of Lazarus in the eleventh chapter.

“ And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto

him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was : and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay." *

Mr. Woolston says, in a mode of expression which he uses without any scruple, this is the most monstrously absurd, improbable, and incredible of any, according to the letter. If the people thronged so much that those who bore the paralytic could not get to the door, why did not they wait till the crowd was dismissed, rather than heave up the sick man to the top of the house with ropes and ladders, break up tiles, spars, and rafters, and make a hole large enough for the man and his bed to be let through to the injury of the house, and the danger and annoyance of those who were within? A slight attention to the ordinary style of architecture in Judea, and to the words of the original, removes every appearance of absurdity in the narration. The houses in Judea were seldom more than two stories high, and the roofs were always flat, with a battlement or parapet round the edges, so that there was no danger in walking or pitching a tent, as was often done upon the roof. There was a stair within the house, which led to a door that lay flat when it was not opened, forming to all appearance a part of the roof, and was secured by a lock or bolt on the inside, to prevent its being readily opened by thieves. By this door the inhabitants of the house could easily get to the roof, and there was often a fixed stair leading to it from the outside, or where that was wanting, a short ladder was occasionally applied. Supposing, then, the house mentioned by Mark to have been built af-

* Mark ii. 1—4.

ter this common fashion ; the court before it so full, that it was not possible to get near the door of the house ; the people so throng, and so earnest in listening, that it was vain to think of their giving place to any one ; in this situation, the four persons who carried the palsied man upon a little couch, κλινιδιον, think of going round to another part of the house, at which by a stair or ladder they easily reach the roof. They find the door lying flat, and the word ἐξορυσσαντες implies that some force was necessary to break it open. That force might have disturbed the family had they been quiet. But at present they are too much engaged to attend to it, or their knowledge of the purpose for which the force was used, prevents them from giving any interruption. The door being made to allow persons to come out upon the roof, and the couch being a κλινιδιον,* it would not be difficult for four men to let down the couch by the stair on the inside, two of them going before to receive it out of the hands of the others. After the couch is thus brought into the room where Jesus was, in the only method by which access could be found to him, he rewards the faith of the sick man by performing, in presence of his enemies, several of whom appear to have mingled with the multitude, an instantaneous and wonderful cure. The palsy is a disease seldom completely, never suddenly removed. The extreme degree in which it affected this man was known to the four who carried him, to the multitude in the midst of whom he was laid, to all the inhabitants of Capernaum. Yet by a word from the mouth of Jesus, he is enabled to rise up and car-

* Luke v. 19, 24.

ry his couch. Judge from this simple exposition, whether the narrative of Mark deserves to be called monstrously absurd and incredible.

The turning of water into wine is recorded in the second chapter of John. The only objection to this miracle which merits consideration, is the offence conceived by Mr. Woolston at the expression which our Lord uses to his mother. And I doubt not that it sounds harsh in the ears of every English reader. "When they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, they have no wine; Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." Here an analysis of the words in the original appears to me to afford a satisfying answer to the objection. I need scarcely remark, that *γυνή* is the word by which women of the highest rank were addressed in ancient times by men of the most polished manners, when they wished to show them every mark of respect. It is used by Jesus, when with filial affection, in his dying moments, he provides every soothing attention for his mother. The phrase *τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοὶ* occurs in some places of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, and also in the New Testament. It is uniformly rendered "What have I to do with thee?" and seems to mark a check, a slight reprimand, a degree of displeasure. It was not unnatural for our translators to give the Greek phrase the same sense here; and many commentators understand our Lord as checking his mother for directing him in the exercise of his divine power. I do not think that such a check would have been inconsistent with that tender concern for his mother which our Lord showed upon the cross. It became him who was endowed with

the Spirit without measure, to be led by that Spirit in the discharge of his public office, and not to commit himself to the narrow conceptions of any of the children of men. I do not therefore find fault with those who understand Jesus as saying, the time of attesting my commission by miracles is not come, and I cannot receive directions from you when it should begin. This may be the meaning of the words. But as they will easily bear another translation, perfectly consistent with the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I am inclined to prefer it. "What is that to thee and me? The want of wine is a matter that concerns the master of the feast. But it need not distress you; and my friends cannot accuse me of unkindness in withholding an exercise of my power, that may be convenient for them, for I have yet done no miracle, the season of my public manifestation not being come." We know that Jesus did not enter upon his ministry till after John was cast into prison. We find John, in the next chapter, baptizing near Salim, and this is called the beginning of miracles. According to this translation, every appearance of harshness is avoided, and the whole story hangs perfectly together. You will observe, Mary was so far from being offended at the supposed harshness of the answer, or conceiving it to be a refusal, that she says to the servants, "Whatever he saith unto you, do it:" and our Lord's doing the miracle after this answer, is a beautiful instance of his attention to his mother. Although his friends had no reason to expect an interposition of his power, because his hour was not come, yet, in compliance with her desire, he supplies plentifully what is wanting.

To the resurrection of Lazarus, in the eleventh chapter of John, Mr. Woolston objects, that the person raised was not a man of eminence sufficient to draw attention—that he gives no account of what he saw in the separate state—that it was absurd in Jesus to call with a loud voice to a dead man—that Lazarus having his head bound is suspicious—and that the whole is a romantic story. Now the answer to all this is to be drawn from the contexture of the narrative, in which, beautiful, simple, and tender as it is, there are interwoven such circumstances as can leave no doubt upon the mind of any person who admits the authenticity of this book, that the greatest of miracles was here really performed. Instead, therefore, of following the frivolous objections of Mr. Woolston one by one, I shall present you with a connected view of these circumstances, as a specimen of the manner in which the credibility of other miracles may be illustrated.

Jesus lingered in the place where he was, when he received the message from the sisters, till the time when, by the divine knowledge that he possessed, he said to the apostles, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” After this, he had a long journey to Bethany; and it does not appear that he performed it hastily, for he learned, as he approached the village, that Lazarus had lain four days in the grave. He delayed so long, that the divine power, which he was to exert in the resurrection of Lazarus, might be magnified in the eyes of the spectators; and, at the same time, he provided an unquestionable testimony for the truth of the miracle, by arriving before the days of mourning were expired. You will be sensible of the effect of this circumstance, if you attend for a moment to the

manners of the Jews respecting funerals. One of the greatest calamities in human life, is the death of those persons whose society had been our comfort and joy. It has been the practice of all countries to testify the sense of this calamity by honours paid to the dead, and by expressions of grief on the part of the living. In eastern countries, where all the passions are strong, and agitate the frame more than in our northern climates, these expressions of grief were often exceedingly violent; and, notwithstanding some wise prohibitions of the law of Moses, the mourning in the land of Judea was more expressive of anguish than that which we commonly see. The dead body was carried out to burial not long after the death. But the house in which the person had died, the furniture of the house, and all who had been in it at that time, became in the eye of the law unclean for seven days. During that time, the near relations of the deceased remained constantly in the house, unless when they went to the grave or sepulchre to mourn over the dead. They did not perform any of the ordinary business of life; they were not considered as in a proper condition for attending the service of the temple, and their neighbours and acquaintances, for these seven days, came to condole with them, bringing bread and wine and other victuals, as there was nothing in the house which could lawfully be used. Upon this charitable errand, a number of Jews, inhabitants of Jerusalem, had come out to Bethany, which was within two miles of the city, upon the day when Jesus arrived there; and thus, as we found the sisters brought out to the sepulchre one after another, by the most natural display of character, so here, without any appearance of a di-

vine interposition, but merely by their following the dictates of good neighbourhood or of decency, the enemies of Jesus are gathered together to be the witnesses of this work. When the Jews saw Mary rise hastily and go out, after the private message which Martha brought her, knowing that she could not go any where but to the sepulchre, they naturally arose to follow her, that they might restrain the extravagance of her grief, and assist in composing her spirit and bringing her home. They found Jesus in the highway where Martha had first met him, groaning in spirit at the distress of the family, and soothing Mary's complaint by this kindly question, "Where have ye laid him?" a question which showed his readiness to take part in her sorrow, by going with her to the house of the dead. The Jews answer his question, "Lord, come and see;" and Jesus suffers himself to be led by them, that they might see there was no preparation for the work he was about to perform, when he stepped out of the highway along with them, and allowed them to reach the sepulchre before him. His tears draw the attention of the crowd as he approaches the place; and the Evangelist has presented to us, in their different remarks, that variety of character which we discover in every multitude. The candid and feeling admired this testimony of his affection for Lazarus, "Behold how he loved him!" Others, who pretended to more sagacity, argued from the grief of Jesus, that, in the death of Lazarus, he had met with a disappointment which he would have prevented if he could. Jesus, without making any reply to either remark, arrives at the grave. John, who wrote his Gospel at a distance from Jerusalem, for the benefit

of those who were strangers to Jewish manners, has given a short description of the grave, which we must carry along with us. The Jews, especially persons of distinction, were generally laid, not in such graves as we commonly see, but in caves hewn in the rocks, with which the land of Judea abounded. Sometimes the sepulchre was in part above the ground, having a door, like that in which our Lord lay. Sometimes it was altogether below ground, having an aperture from which a stair led down to the bottom, and this aperture covered with a stone, except when the sepulchre was to be opened. The body, swathed in linen, with the feet and hands tightly bound, and the whole face covered by a napkin, was laid, not in a coffin, but in a niche or cell of the sepulchre. As the Jews, at the command of Jesus, were attempting to take away the stone, Martha seems to stagger in the faith which she had formerly expressed. "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been *dead* four days," τεταρταριος γαρ εστι. The word means, that he has been four days in some particular condition, without expressing what condition is meant. Now, his present condition is, being in the cave. It was mentioned before, that he had been there four days, and therefore our translators should have inserted in italics the word *buried*, not the word *dead*. Jesus revives the faith of Martha; and as soon as the stone is removed, he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and thanks the Father for having heard him. His enemies said, that he did his mighty works by the assistance of the devil. Here, in the act of performing the greatest of them, he prays, with perfect assurance of being heard, ascribes the honour to God, and takes to himself

the name of the messenger of heaven. Think of the suspense and earnest attention of the multitude, while, after the sepulchre is opened, Jesus is uttering this solemn prayer. How would the suspense be increased, when Jesus, to show the whole multitude that the resurrection of Lazarus was his deed, calls with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And what would be their astonishment when they saw this command instantly obeyed; the man who had lain four days in the sepulchre, sliding his limbs down from the cell, and standing before it upright! The bandages prevent him from moving forward. But Jesus, by ordering the Jews to loose him, gives them a nearer opportunity of examining this wonderful sight, and of deriving, from the dress of his body, from the state of the grave clothes, from the manner in which the napkin smothered his face, various convincing proofs, that the man whom they now saw and touched alive, had been truly numbered among the dead.

The contexture of this narration is such as to efface from our minds every objection against the consistency of it; and the greatness of the miracle is obvious. We behold in this work the Lord of Life. None can restore a man who had seen corruption, but He who in the beginning created him. Jesus gives us here a sample of the general resurrection, and a sensible sign that he is able to deliver from the second death. This is the meaning of that expression, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," *οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, *i. e.* shall not die for ever. Natural death is the separation of soul and body; eternal death is the loss, the degradation, and final wretchedness of the soul. Both are the

wages of sin, and Jesus delivers from the first, which is visible, as a pledge of his being able to deliver, in due time, those who live and believe in him, from the second also. The miracle is in this way stated by himself, both as a confirmation of his mission, and as an illustration of the great doctrine of his religion.

Before leaving the circumstances of the miracle I would observe, that however ably such objections as I have mentioned may be answered, there is much caution to be used in stating them to a Christian assembly. It is very improper to communicate to the people all the extravagant frivolous conceits that have been broached by the enemies of Christianity. The objection may remain with them after they have forgotten the answer ; and their faith may be shaken by finding that it has received so many attacks. It becomes the ministers of religion indeed, to possess their minds with a profound knowledge of the evidences of Christianity, and of the answers that may be made to objections. But out of this store-house they should bring forth to the people a clear unembarrassed view of every subject upon which they speak, so as to create no doubt or suspicion in those who hear them, but to give their faith that stability which is always connected with distinct apprehension.

III. It remains to say a few words upon the effects which this miracle produced. Some of the persons who had come to comfort Mary, when they saw " the things which Jesus did, believed on him." It was the conclusion of right reason, that a man who, in the sight of a multitude, exerted, without preparation, a power to which no human exertion deserves to be compared, was a messenger of heaven.

It was the conclusion of an enlightened and unprejudiced Jew, that this extraordinary person, appearing in the land of Judea, was the Messiah, whose coming was to be distinguished by signs and wonders. The chosen people of God, who "waited for the consolation of Israel," found in this miracle the most striking marks of him that should come. The conclusion seems to arise naturally out of the premises. Yet it was not drawn by all. Many believed, "but some went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done." They knew the enmity which these leading men entertained against him. They were afraid of incurring their anger, by appearing to be his disciples; they hoped to obtain their favour by informing against him; and, sacrificing their conviction to this fear and this hope, they go from the sepulchre of Lazarus, where with astonishment they had seen the power of Jesus, to inflame the minds of his enemies by a recital of the deed. And what do these enemies do? They could not entertain a doubt of the fact. It was told them by witnesses who had no interest in forging or exaggerating miracles ascribed to Jesus. The place was at hand; inquiry was easy; and the imposture, had there been any, could not have remained hidden at Jerusalem for a day. The Pharisees, therefore, in their deliberations, proceed upon the fact as undeniable. "This man doth many miracles." But, from mistaken views of political expediency, the result of their deliberation is, "They take counsel together to put him to death."

There is thus furnished a satisfactory answer to a question that has often been asked, If Jesus really did such miracles, how is it possible that any who

saw them could remain in unbelief? Many, we are told, did believe; and here is a view of the motives which indisposed others for attending to the evidence which was exhibited to them, and even determined them to reject it. You cannot be surprised at the influence which such motives exerted at that time, because the like influence of similar motives is a matter of daily observation. The evidence upon which we embrace Christianity is not the same which the Jews had; but it is sufficient. All the parts of it have been fully illustrated; every objection has received an apposite answer; the gainsayers have been driven out of every hold which they have tried to occupy; the wisest and most enlightened men in every age have admitted the evidence, and “set to their seal that God is true.” Yet it is rejected by many. Pride, false hopes, or evil passions, detain them in infidelity. They ask for more evidence. They say they suspect collusion, enthusiasm, credulity. But the example of those Jews, who went their ways to the Pharisees, may satisfy you that there is no defect in the evidence, and that there is the most literal truth in our Lord’s declaration, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

The different effects which the same religious truths and the same religious advantages produce upon different persons, afford one instance of a state of trial. God is now proving the hearts of the children of men, drawing them to himself by persuasion, by that moral evidence which is enough to satisfy, not to overpower. Faith in this way becomes a moral virtue. A trial is taken of the good-

ness and honesty of the heart. “ If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light ; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !” The same seed of the word is scattered by the blessed sower in various soils, and the quality of the soil is left to appear by the produce.

Pierce's Commentary.

CHAP. VI.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY—PROPHECY.

HAD Jesus appeared only as a messenger of heaven, the points already considered might have finished the defence of Christianity, because we should have been entitled to say that miracles such as those recorded in the Gospel, transmitted upon so unexceptionable a testimony, and wrought in support of a doctrine so worthy of God, are the complete credentials of a divine mission. But the nature of that claim which is made in the Gospel requires a further defence: for it is not barely said that Jesus was a messenger from heaven, but it is said that he was the Messiah of the Jews, “the prophet that should come into the world.”* John, his forerunner, marked him out as the Christ.† He himself, in his discourses with the Jews, often referred to their books, which he said wrote of him.‡ Before his ascension, he expounded to his disciples in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.§ They went forth after his death declaring that they said none other things than those which

* John iv. 26 ; vi. 14.

† John i. 29—31.

‡ John v. 39, 46.

§ Luke xxiv. 27.

the prophets and Moses did say should come ;* and in all their discourses and writings they held forth the Gospel as the end of the law, the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham, the performance of the mercy promised to the fathers.

If the Gospel be a divine revelation, these allegations must be true ; for it is impossible that a messenger from heaven can advance a false claim. Although, therefore, the nature of the doctrine, and the confirmation which it receives from miracles, might have been sufficient to establish our faith, had no such claim been made ; yet, as Jesus has chosen to call himself the Messiah of the Jews, it is incumbent upon Christians to examine the correspondence between that system contained in the books of the Jews, and that contained in the New Testament ; and their faith does not rest upon a solid foundation, unless they can satisfy their minds that the characters of the Jewish Messiah belong to Jesus. It is to be presumed that he had wise reasons for taking to himself this name, and that the faith of his disciples will be very much strengthened by tracing the connection between the two dispensations. But the nature and the force of the argument from prophecy will unfold itself in the progress of the investigation ; and it is better to begin with attending to the facts upon which the argument rests, and the steps which lead to the conclusion, than to form premature conceptions of the amount of this part of the evidence for Christianity.

* Acts xxvi. 22.

SECTION I.

IN every investigation, it is of great importance to ascertain precisely the point from which you set out, that there may be no danger of confounding the points that are assumed, with those that are to be proven. There is much reason for making this remark in entering upon the subject which we are now to investigate, because attempts have been made to render it confused and inextricable, by misstating the manner in which the investigation ought to proceed. Mr. Gibbon, speaking of that argument from prophecy, which often occurs in the apologies of the primitive Christians, calls it an argument beneath the notice of philosophers. "It might serve," he says, "to edify a Christian, or to convert a Jew, since both the one and the other acknowledge the authority of the prophets, and both are obliged with devout reverence to search for their sense and accomplishment. But this mode of persuasion loses much of its weight and influence, when it is addressed to those who neither understand nor respect the Mosaic dispensation, or the prophetic spirit."* Mr. Gibbon learned to use this supercilious inaccurate language from Mr. Collins, an author of whom I shall have occasion to speak fully before I finish the discussion of this subject, and who lays it down as the fundamental position of his book, that Christianity is founded upon Judaism, and from thence infers that the Gentiles ought regularly to be con-

* Gibbon's Roman History, chap. xv.

verted to Judaism before they can become Christians. The object of the inference is manifest. It is to us, in these later ages, a much shorter process to attain a conviction of the truth of Christianity, than to attain, without the assistance of the Gospel, a conviction of the divine origin of Judaism : and, therefore, if it be necessary that we become converts to Judaism before we become Christians, the evidence of our religion is involved in numberless difficulties, and the field of objection is so much extended, that the adversaries of our faith may hope to persuade the generality of mankind that the subject is too intricate for their understanding. The design is manifest ; but nothing can be more loose or fallacious than the statement which is employed to accomplish this design. In order to perceive this you need only attend to the difference between a Jew and a Gentile in the conduct of this investigation. A Jew who respects the Mosaic dispensation and the prophetic spirit, looks for the fulfilment of those prophecies which appear to him to be contained in his sacred books, and when any person declares that these prophecies are fulfilled in him, the Jew is led by that respect to compare the circumstances in the appearance of that person with what he accounts the right interpretation of the prophecies, and to form his judgment whether they be fulfilled. A Gentile, to whom the divinity of the prophecies was formerly unknown, but who hears a person declaring that they are fulfilled in him, if he is disposed by other circumstances to pay any respect to what that person says, will be led by that respect to inquire after the books in which these prophecies are said to be contained, will compare

the appearance of that person with what is written in these books, and will judge from this comparison how far they correspond. Both the Jew and the Gentile may be led by this comparison to a firm conviction that the messenger whose character and history they examine, is the person foretold in the prophecies. Yet the Jew set out with the belief that the prophecies are divine; the Gentile only attained that belief in the progress of the examination. It is not possible, then, that a previous belief of the divinity of the prophecies is necessary in order to judge of the fulfilment of them; for two men may form the same judgment in this matter, the one of whom from the beginning had that belief, and the other had it not.

The true point from which an investigation of the fulfilment of prophecy must commence, is this, that the books containing what is called the prophecy, existed a considerable time before the events which are said to be the fulfilment of it. I say, a considerable time, because the nearer that the first appearance of these books was to the event, it is the more possible that human sagacity may account for the coincidence, and the remoter the period is, to which their existence can be traced, that account becomes the more improbable. Let us place ourselves, then, in the situation of those Gentiles whom the first preachers of the Gospel addressed; let us suppose that we know no more about the books of the Jews than they might know, and let us consider how we may satisfy ourselves as to the preliminary point upon which the investigation must proceed.

The prophecies to which Jesus and his apostles refer, did not proceed from the hands of obscure

individuals, and appear in that suspicious form which attends every prediction of an unknown date and a hidden origin. They were presented to the world in the public records of a nation ; they are completely incorporated with these records, and they form part of a series of predictions which cannot be disjoined from the constitution and history of the state. This nation, however singular in its religious principles, and in what appeared to the world to be its political revolutions, was not unknown to its neighbours. By its geographical situation, it had a natural connection with the greatest empires of the world. War and commerce occasionally brought the flourishing kingdom of Judea into their view ; and, although repugnant in manners and in worship, they were witnesses of the existence and the peculiarities of this kingdom. The captivity, first of the ten tribes by Salmanazar, afterwards of the two tribes by Nebuchadnezzar, served still more to draw the attention of the world, many centuries before the birth of Christ, to the peculiarities of Jewish manners. And there was a circumstance in the return of the two tribes from captivity, which was to those who observed it in ancient times, and is to us at this day, a singular and unquestionable voucher of the early existence of their books. Nehemiah was appointed by the king of Persia to superintend the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. He had received much opposition in this work from Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, that district of Palestine which the ten tribes had inhabited, and into which the king of Assyria had, at the time of their captivity, transplanted his own subjects. The work, however, was finished, and Nehemiah proceed-

ed in making the regulations which appeared to him necessary for maintaining order, and the observance of the law of Moses amongst the multitude whom he had gathered into Jerusalem. Some of these regulations were not universally agreeable ; and Manasseh, a son of the high priest, who had married a daughter of Sanballat, fled at the head of the male-content Jews into Samaria. The Law of Moses was not acknowledged in Samaria, for the king of Assyria, after the first captivity, had sent a priest to instruct those whom he planted there, in the worship of the God of the country, and for some time they had offered sacrifices to idols in conjunction with the true God. But Manasseh, emulous of the Jews whom he had left, and considering the honour of a descendant of Aaron as concerned in the purity of worship which he established in his new residence, prevailed upon the inhabitants to put away their idols, built a temple to the God of Israel upon Mount Gerizim, and introduced a copy of the law of Moses, or the Pentateuch. He did not introduce any of the later books of the Old Testament, lest the Samaritans, observing the peculiar honours with which God had distinguished Jerusalem, “ the place which he had chosen, to put his name there,” should entertain less reverence for the temple of Gerizim. And as a farther mark of distinction, Manasseh had the book of the law written for the Samaritans, not in the Chaldee character, which Ezra had adopted in the copies of the law which he made for the Jews, to whom that language had become familiar during the captivity, but in the old Samaritan character. During the successive fortunes of the Jewish nation, the Samaritans continued to reside in

their neighbourhood, worshipping the same God, and using the same law. But between the two nations there was that kind of antipathy, which, in religious differences, is often the more bitter, the less essential the disputed points are, and which, in this case, proceeded so far that the Jews and Samaritans not only held no communion in worship, but had "no dealings with one another."

Here then are two rival tribes stated in opposition and enmity five hundred years before Christ, yet acknowledging and preserving the same laws, as if appointed by Providence to watch over the corruptions which either might be disposed to introduce, and to transmit to the nations of the earth, pure and free from suspicion, those books in which Moses wrote of Jesus. The Samaritan Pentateuch is often quoted by the early fathers. After it had been unknown for a thousand years, it was found by the industry of some of those critics who lived at the beginning of the seventeenth century, amongst the remnant who still worship at Gerizim. Copies of it were brought into Europe, and the learned have now an opportunity of comparing the Samaritan text used by the followers of Manasseh, with the Hebrew or Chaldee text used by the Jews.

While this ancient schism thus furnished succeeding ages with jealous guardians of the Pentateuch, the existence and integrity of all their Scriptures were vouched by another event in the history of the Jews.

Alexander the Great, in the progress of his conquests, either visited the land of Judea, or received intelligence concerning the Jews. His inquisitive mind, which was no stranger to science, and which

was not less intent upon great plans of commerce than of conquest, was probably struck with the peculiarities of this ancient people ; and when he founded his city Alexandria, he invited many of the Jews to settle there. The privileges which he and his successors conferred upon them, and the advantages of that situation, multiplied the Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria ; and the constant intercourse of trade obliged them to learn the Greek language, which the conquerors of Asia had introduced through all the extent of the Macedonian empire. Retaining the religion and manners of Judea, but gradually forgetting the language of that country, they became desirous that their Scriptures, the canon of which was by this time complete, should be translated into Greek ; and it was especially proper that there should be a translation of the Pentateuch for the use of the synagogue, where a portion of it was read every Sabbath-day. We have the best reason for saying that that translation of the Old Testament, which, from an account of the manner of its being made, probably in many points fabulous, has received the name of the Septuagint, was begun at Alexandria about two hundred and eighty years before Christ ; and we cannot doubt that the whole of the Pentateuch was translated at once. Learned men have conjectured, indeed, from a difference of style, that the other parts of the Old Testament were translated by other hands. But it is very improbable that a work, so acceptable to the numerous and wealthy body of Jews who resided at Alexandria, would receive any long interruption after it was begun ; and a subsequent event in the Jewish history appears to fix a time when a transla-

tion of the prophets would be demanded. About the middle of the second century before Christ, Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, committed the most outrageous acts of wanton cruelty against the whole nation of the Jews; and as he contended with the King of Egypt for the conquest of Palestine, we may believe that the Jews of Alexandria shared the fate of their brethren, as far as the power of Antiochus could reach them. Amongst other edicts which he issued, he forbade any Jews to read the law of Moses in public. As the prohibition did not extend to the prophets, the Jews began at this time to substitute portions of the prophets instead of the law. After the heroical exploits of the Asmonæan family, the Maccabees had delivered their country from the tyranny of Antiochus, and restored the reading of the law, the prophets continued to be read also; and we know that before the days of our Saviour, reading both the law and the prophets was a stated part of the synagogue service. In this way the whole of the Septuagint translation came to be used in the churches of the Hellenistical Jews scattered through the Grecian cities; and we are told it was used in some of the synagogues of Judea.

When Rome, then, entered into an alliance with the princes of the Asmonæan line, who were at that time independent sovereigns, and when Judea, experiencing the same fate with the other allies of that ambitious republic, was subdued by Pompey about sixty years before the birth of our Saviour, the books of the Jews were publicly read in a language which was then universal. The diffusion of the Jews through all parts of the Roman empire, and the veneration in which they held their scriptures, con-

spired to assure the heathen that such books existed, and to spread some general knowledge of their contents: and even could we suppose it possible for a nation so zealous of the law, and so widely scattered as the Jews were, to enter into a concert for altering their scriptures, we must be sensible that insuperable difficulties were thrown in the way of such an attempt, by the animosity between the religious sects which at that time flourished in Judea. The Sadducees and the Pharisees differed upon essential points respecting the interpretation and extent of the law; they were rivals for reputation and influence; there were learned men upon both sides, and both acknowledged the authority of Moses; and thus, as the Samaritans and the Jews in ancient times were appointed of God to watch over the Pentateuch; so, in the ages immediately before our Saviour, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were faithful guardians of all the ancient scriptures.

Such is the amount of that testimony to the existence of their sacred books, long before the days of our Saviour, with which the Jews, a nation superstitiously attached to their law, widely spread, and strictly guarded, present them to the world; and to this testimony there are to be added the many internal marks of authenticity which these books exhibit to a discerning reader,—the agreement of the natural, the civil, and the religious history of the world, with those views which they present—the incidental mention that profane writers have made of Jewish customs and peculiarities, which is always strictly conformable to the contents of these books—the express reference to many of them that occurs in the New Testament, a reference which must have

destroyed the credit of the Gospels and Epistles, if the books referred to had not been known to have a previous existence—and, lastly, the evidence of Josephus, the Jewish historian, a man of rank and of science, who may be considered as a contemporary of Jesus, and who has given in his works a catalogue of the Jewish books, not upon his own authority, but upon the authority and ancient conviction of his nation, a catalogue which agrees both in number and in description with the books of the Old Testament that we now receive. Even Daniel, the only writer of the Old Testament against the authenticity of whose book any special objections have been offered, is styled by Josephus a prophet, and is extolled as the greatest of the prophets; and his book is said by this respectable Jew to be a part of the canonical scriptures of his nation.*

It appears, from laying all these circumstances together, that as our Lord and his apostles had a title to assume in their addresses to the Gentiles, the previous existence of the Jewish scriptures as a fact generally and clearly known, so no doubt can be reasonably entertained of this fact, even in the distant age in which we live. I do not speak of these scriptures as a divine revelation; I abstract entirely from that sacred authority which the Christian religion communicates to them; I speak of them merely as an ancient book; and I say, that while there is no improbability in the most remote date which any part of this book claims, there is real satisfying evidence, to which no degree of scepticism

* Joseph. lib. x. cap. 11, 12.

can justify any man for refusing his assent, that all the parts had an existence, and might have been known in the world, some centuries before the Christian era.

Having thus satisfied our minds of the previous existence of those scriptures, to which Jesus appeals as containing characters of the Messiah which are fulfilled in him, it is natural, before we examine his appeal, to inquire whether the nation who have transmitted these scriptures, entertained any expectation of such a person. For although it be possible that they might be ignorant of the full meaning of the oracles committed to them, and that a great Prophet might explain to the nations of the earth that true sense which the keepers of these oracles did not understand, yet his appeal would be received with more attention, and even with a prejudice in its favour, if it accorded with the hopes of those who had the best access to know the grounds of it. Now, it is admitted upon all hands, that at the time of our Saviour's birth there was in the land of Judea the most earnest expectation, and the most assured hope, that an extraordinary personage, to whom the Jews gave the name of Messiah, was to arise. We read in the New Testament, that many looked for redemption in Jerusalem, and waited for the consolation of Israel ; that when John appeared, all men mused in their hearts whether he was the Christ, and the priests and Levites sent messages to ask him, Art thou that prophet ? that the conclusion which the people drew from some of the first of our Lord's miracles was, " This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world ;" and that the expectation of this person had spread to

other countries; for wise men came from the east to Jerusalem, in search of him who was to be born King of the Jews.* You will not think it unfair reasoning to quote these passages from the New Testament in proof of the expectation of a Messiah; for it is impossible that the books which refer in such marked terms to a sentiment so universal and strong, could have been received by any inhabitant of Judea, if that sentiment had no existence; and the inference which we are thus entitled to draw from the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, is confirmed in every way that the nature of the case admits of, by historians who write of these times, by the books of the ancient Jews, and the sentiments of the modern. Josephus, Suetonius, and Tacitus, although desirous to flatter the Roman emperor Vespasian, by applying the prophecies to him, yet unite in attesting the expectation which these prophecies had raised. Josephus says, "That which chiefly excited the Jews to war, was an ambiguous prophecy found in the sacred books, that at that time some one within their country should arise, that should obtain the empire of the world. For this they had received by tradition, that it was spoken of one of their nation, and many wise men were deceived with the interpretation. But, in truth, Vespasian's empire was designed in this prophecy, who was created emperor in Judea."† Josephus, although he affects in this place, (he speaks otherwise elsewhere,) to condemn that interpretation of the prophecy which led the Jews to expect a Mes-

* Luke ii. and iii; John i. and vi; Matt. ii.

† Jos. Hist. vi. 31.

siah, yet acknowledges that this expectation was general, derived from the prophecies, and entertained by many of the wise. Suetonius says, “Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatiis, ut eo tempore Judæâ profecti rerum potirentur. Id de imperatore Romano, quantum postea eventu patuit, prædictum, Judæi ad se trahentes, rebellârunt.”* Tacitus says, “Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret Oriens, profectique Judæa rerum potirentur. Quæ ambages Vespasianum ac Titum prædixerant. Sed vulgus, more humanæ cupidinis, sibi tantam factorum magnitudinem interpretati, ne adversis quidem ad vera mutabantur.”† Both historians, with that very *cupido* which they charge upon the Jews, apply the prophecy to a Roman emperor; an application which, at the time, was most unnatural, and which the event has clearly shown to be false. But both bear witness to the existence and antiquity of the prophecy, and to the universality and strength of the expectation grounded upon it. The oldest Rabbini- cal books extant, are the Targum of Onkelos on the Pentateuch, and the Targum of Jonathan on the Prophets; Targums, *i. e.* interpretations or paraphrases of the books of the Old Testament, composed for the instruction of the people, and used in the synagogues. There are many more modern Targums. But these two, Onkelos and Jonathan, are said by the Jews to have been written before or about the time of our Saviour, and they appear to be collections from more ancient books. They con-

* Suct. Vespas. vi. 8.

† Tacit. Hist. lib. v. 9.

tinued always in the hands of the Jews; they were not known to the Christians till a few centuries ago, yet they uniformly bear testimony to the national expectation of a Messiah, and mark out the prophecies which had produced that expectation. Even the Samaritans, who had only the Pentateuch, entertained the same expectation with the Jews. "I know," said the Samaritan woman, in the Gospel of John, "that Messiah cometh. When he is come, he will tell us all things."* And it deserves to be mentioned, that those learned men, who, in the beginning of the 17th century, introduced the Samaritan Pentateuch into Europe, obtained also from the remnant which still worships upon Mount Gerizim, a declaration of their faith concerning the Messiah. "You would know," they say, in a letter which is extant, "whether the Messiah be come, and whether it be he that is promised in our law as the Shiloh. Know that the Messiah is not yet risen. But he shall rise, and his name shall be Hathab." It is well known that the modern Jews still retain hopes that the Messiah will come. They have devised various schemes to account for his delay, and to elude the argument which we draw from the application of the prophecies to Jesus. But even their modern doctors declare, that he who believes the law of Moses should believe the coming of the Messiah; for the law commands us to believe in the prophets, and the prophets foretell his coming.

This much, then, we have gained by attending to the sentiments of the Jews—satisfying evidence that it was not an invention of our Lord and his apostles,

to say, that Moses wrote of the Messiah; that Abraham rejoiced to see his day; that David, being a prophet, foresaw him in spirit; and that all the prophets, from Samuel, foretold of his days. The Jews said the same thing, and looked for the fulfilment of the promises made to their fathers. How ancient this expectation was, we cannot say, because, except the scriptures of the Old Testament, we have no Jewish books of unquestionable authority older than the days of our Saviour. But as it is clear that the expectation was not at that time new, as the first of the Jewish books extant declare, that all the prophets, from Moses to Malachi, prophesied only of the Messiah, and abound with explications of particular predictions, and as the most ancient prayers of the people in their synagogues adopt these explications, speaking of the Messiah under the names and characters ascribed to him in the predictions, it does not seem to admit of a doubt, that the hope of the Messiah was, in all ages among the Jews, the received national interpretation of those predictions in which they gloried.

The matter, then, is brought to a short issue. Certain books existed some centuries before the birth of Jesus, which raised in the nation that kept them a general expectation of an extraordinary personage. Jesus appeared in Judea, claiming to be that personage. The people in whose possession the books had always remained, are bound by their national expectations to examine his claim. The curiosity of the other nations to whom this claim is made known, or to whom the person advancing it appears upon other accounts respectable, is excited by the coincidence between the claim, and the expectations of that

people upon whose ancient books it is founded : and thus both Jews and Gentiles, without any previous agreement in religious opinions, are called to attend to the same object, and one point is submitted to their examination : Whether the predictions concerning the Jewish Messiah apply to the circumstances in the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth.

SECTION II.

THE obvious method of proving that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, is to compare the predictions in their scriptures with the circumstances of his appearance. It is impossible, in any other way, to attain a conviction of the justness of his claim to that character ; and it is clear, that if his claim be well founded, this method will be sufficient to ascertain it. This is the method which our Lord prescribed to the Jews. “ Search the Scriptures, for these are they which testify of me.” It is the method which he employed when, before his ascension, “ he expounded to his disciples the things which were written concerning him in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms.” It is the method by which Philip converted the minister of the Queen of Ethiopia, when he began at the 53d chapter of Isaiah, and preached to him Jesus. And it is the method which is continually recurring in the discourses and writings of the apostles.

A person who had no previous information upon the subject, would be obliged, in following this method, to mark, as he read through the Scriptures of the Old Testament, those passages which to him appeared to point to an extraordinary person ; and then he would either apply every one singly, or all of them collectively to Jesus, in order to judge how far they were fulfilled in him. But we are provided with much assistance in this examination. We are directed, in our search of the Old Testament, by the passages which our Lord and his apostles have quoted, by the knowledge which men versant in Jewish learning have diffused of the predictions marked in the Jewish Targums, and by the labours of the ancient apologists for Christianity, and of many divines since the Reformation, and more especially since the beginning of the last century, who, with very sound critical talents, and much historical information, have devoted themselves to the elucidation of this subject. There is no reason why we should not avail ourselves of these helps. They abridge the labour of investigation ; but they do not necessarily bias our judgments. We may examine a prophecy which is pointed out to us, as strictly as if we ourselves had discovered it to be a prophecy. We may even indulge a certain degree of jealousy with regard to all the prophecies which are suggested by the friends of Christianity, and may fortify our minds with the resolution that nothing but the most marked and striking correspondence shall overcome this jealousy. It is right for you to employ every fair precaution against being deceived ; and then take into your hands any of those books which serve as an index to the predictions in the Old Testament respecting the Mes-

siah. You have an excellent index in Clarke's *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, which is, upon the whole, one of the best elementary books for a student in divinity, and which is rendered peculiarly useful with regard to the prophecies, by a part of Dr. Clarke's character that appears in all his theological writings—an intimate profound knowledge of Scripture, and a faculty of bringing together, and arranging in the most lucid order all the texts which relate to a subject. You have another index in Bishop Chandler's *Defence of Christianity*. Sherlock, Newton, Jortin, Hurd, Halifax, Bagot, Macknight, and other divines, have both given a full explication of some particular predictions, and directed to the solution of many others. The comparison of the predictions in the Old Testament respecting the Messiah, with the facts recorded in the New, is one of the most essential parts of the education of a student in divinity. Other Christians may not have leisure for such an employment. But it is expected from your profession, that you know the occasions upon which the predictions were given, and that you are able to defend the received interpretations of them, and to state the order in which they succeeded one another, and the manner in which they were fulfilled. And if you either bring to this inquiry critical sagacity, and historical information of your own, or avail yourselves judiciously of the labours of others, you will attain an enlightened and firm conviction that Jesus is not only a messenger from heaven, but the Messiah of the Jews.

It is impossible for me to lead you through all the particulars of this investigation. But I shall mention, in a few words, the result to which men of the

soundest judgment have been conducted, and which they have rendered it easy for us to teach ; and then I shall give you a specimen of the exact fulfilment of Jewish prophecy in Jesus.

Moses, by whom the most ancient predictions were compiled, lived a thousand years before Malachi ; and Malachi lived after the Jews had returned from their captivity, above four hundred years before the birth of our Saviour. During the long period that intervened between the earliest and the latest prophets, there are scattered through the books of the Old Testament predictions of a dispensation of Providence, to be executed in a future time by an extraordinary personage. And all these predictions are found to apply to the history of Jesus of Nazareth. Although the predictions which point through such a length of time to one dispensation, differ widely from one another in clearness and imagery, not one of them is inconsistent with the facts recorded in the gospel. By the help of that interpretation which the event gives to the prophecy, we can see an uniformity and continuity in the scheme. The more general expressions of the ancient prophets, and the more minute descriptions of the latter, illustrate one another. Every prediction appears to stand in its proper place, and every clause assumes importance and significance.

There are two circumstances which every false prophet is careful to avoid, or at least to express in ambiguous terms, but which were precisely marked, and literally accomplished with regard to the Messiah. The circumstances are, time and place. It was foretold in a succession of limiting prophecies, that that seed of the woman which was to bruise the head

of the serpent, should arise out of the family of Abraham, out of the children of Israel, out of the tribe of Judah, out of the house of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was born. It is said in the book of Chronicles, "Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler." * And to satisfy us that this prophecy was not exhausted by the rulers that had formerly come of Judah, we read in Micah, who lived in the reign of King Hezekiah, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." † Here is the place, an obscure village in Judea, so fixed by prophecy, seven hundred years before the event, that the ancient Jews expected the Messiah was to be born there; and some of the modern Jews have said that he was born before Bethlehem was desolated, and lies hidden in the ruins. The time is also fixed. Daniel numbered seventy weeks, that is according to the prophetic style, in which a day stands for a year, four hundred and ninety years, as the interval between the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem, and the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. ‡ This interpretation of the weeks of Daniel, which learned men have, I think, incontrovertibly established, is confirmed by other predictions still more clear, which declare that the extraordinary personage was to arise out of Judea, while it remained a distinct tribe, possessing some authority, and while its temple stood;

* Chron. v. 2.

† Micah v. 2.

‡ Daniel ix. 24, 25.

and that he was to arise during the fourth kingdom, after the Romans became masters of the world. The four successive kingdoms are described in the interpretation of the vision in the seventh chapter of Daniel, and so described, that any person versant in history cannot mistake the Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman. The Romans had successively conquered the three other branches of the Macedonian empire. But Egypt still existed as an independent kingdom, till the unfortunate Cleopatra ended her days at the battle of Actium, thirty years before the birth of our Saviour; the next year Egypt was made tributary to Rome; and then, first, says the historian Dion Cassius, did Cæsar alone possess all power. The city and temple of Jerusalem were destroyed, and the constitution of the Jewish state annihilated about seventy years after the birth of our Saviour. Thus the establishment of the universal empire of Rome, and the desolation of Jerusalem, are two limits marked by ancient prophecy. The Messiah was to be born after the first, and before the last. They contain between them a space of about a hundred years, within which space the Messiah was to be born; but at such a distance from the last of the two limits, as to allow time for his preaching to the Jews, for his being rejected by them, and for their suffering upon account of that rejection; all which events were also foretold. Within the space of a hundred years the different divisions of Daniel's seventy weeks had their end; and within this space Jesus was born. According to every method, then, in which the time of the Messiah's birth can be computed from ancient predictions, it was fulfilled in

Jesus ; and this fulfilment of the time brought about, by a wonderful concurrence of circumstances, a fulfilment with regard to the place also of the Messiah's birth. After the Romans, in the progress of their conquests, had subdued Syria, and the other parts of the Macedonian empire adjoining to Judea, that state, standing alone, could not long remain independent. Its form of government was for some time preserved by the indulgence of the Romans. But, about forty years before the birth of our Saviour, an act of the senate set aside the succession of the Asmonean princes, and conferred the crown of Judea upon Herod the Great. Although Herod was king of Judea, he held his kingdom as a prince dependent upon Rome ; and, in token of his vassalage, an order was issued by Augustus, before his death, that there should be a general enrolment of the inhabitants of Palestine ; that is, the Roman census, by which the state acquired a knowledge of the numbers, the wealth, and the condition of its subjects, was extended to this appendage of the Roman empire. In conformity to the Jewish method of classing the people by tribes and families, every inhabitant of Palestine was ordered to have his name enrolled, not in the city where he happened to reside, but in that to which the founder of his house had belonged, and which, in the language of the Jews, was the city of his people. By this order, which was totally independent of the will of Joseph and Mary, and which involved in it a decree of the Roman emperor then for the first time issued concerning Judea, and a resolution of the king of Judea to adopt a particular mode of executing that decree, Joseph and Mary are brought from a distant corner of Palestine to Beth-

lehem. They are brought at a time when Mary would not have chosen such a journey: and Jesus, to their great inconvenience and distress, is born in a stable, and laid in a manger. It is not easy for any person who attends to these circumstances, to refrain from acknowledging the hand of Providence, connecting the time and the place of the birth of Jesus, so as that, without the possibility of human preparation, they should together fulfil the words of ancient prophets.

I have selected these two necessary accompaniments of every action, because it was possible, within a short compass, to give you a striking view of the coincidence between the prediction and the event. But the same coincidence extends through a multitude of circumstances, which in the prophecies appear minute, unrelated, and sometimes contradictory, and which cannot be applied to any one person who ever lived upon earth, except to Jesus of Nazareth, in whom they are united with perfect harmony, so that every one has a meaning, and all together form a consistent whole.

It would seem, then, that we are fully warranted in saying that the circumstances in the appearance of Jesus correspond to the predictions of the Old Testament respecting the Messiah of the Jews, and that the presumptive and the direct proof of his being a messenger of heaven, are entitled to all the support, which they can derive from the justness of his claim to the character of Messiah.

SECTION III.

BUT the adversaries of Christianity do not allow us so readily to draw this conclusion : And there are objections to the argument from prophecy, the proper answer to which well deserves your study. These objections were brought forward, and stated with much art and plausibility, in a book entitled, *Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, written after the beginning of the last century, by Mr. Collins. Bishop Chandler's *Defence of Christianity*, from the prophecies of the Old Testament, was an answer to this book : and Mr. Collins published a reply, entitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered*. Bishop Sherlock in his discourses on Prophecy, Warburton in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, and many modern divines, have combated with sound learning and argument the positions of Mr. Collins ; so that any student who applies to this important subject, may receive very able assistance in forming his judgment.

I shall state to you the objections, with the answers. The position of Mr. Collins' book is this : Christianity is founded on Judaism. Our Lord and his apostles prove Christianity from the Old Testament. If the proofs which they draw from thence are valid, Christianity is true : if they are not valid, Christianity is false. But all the prophecies of the Old Testament are applicable to Christ only in a secondary, typical, allegorical sense. Such a sense, being fanatical and chimerical, cannot be admitted according to the scholastic rules of interpretation. And thus Christianity, deriving no real support from Judaism upon which it is professedly grounded, must be false.

To this artful mis-statement of the subject, we have two answers.

The first is, that there are in the Old Testament direct prophecies of the Messiah, which, not in a secondary, but in their primary sense, apply to Jesus of Nazareth. There is in the Pentateuch a promise of a prophet to be raised up from amongst the Jews like unto Moses.* But none in all the succession of Jewish prophets was like him in the free intercourse which he had with the Almighty, the importance of the commission which he bore, and the signs which he did. And, therefore, that succession not only kept alive the expectation, but was itself a pledge of the great prophet that should come. The writings of the succession of prophets are full of predictions concerning a new dispensation more glorious, more general, more spiritual than the Jewish economy, when “the sons of the stranger should join themselves to the Lord;” when “his house should be an house of prayer for all people;” when “the gods of the earth should be famished,” no more offerings being presented to them, and “every one from his place,” not at Jerusalem, but in his ordinary residence, “should worship Jehovah.” “Behold the days come, saith the Lord,” by Jeremiah, who lived in the time of the captivity, “that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their

* Deut. xviii. 15, 18.

hearts ; and I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”* It is further to be remarked, that the prophecy of this new spiritual dispensation is connected throughout the Old Testament with the mention of a person by whom the dispensation was to be introduced. If it is called a covenant, we read of the Messenger of the Covenant. If it is called a kingdom, set up by the God of heaven, which should never be destroyed, we read of a chief ruler to come out of Judah, of the Prince of Peace who was to sit on the throne of his father David, to establish it with justice and judgment for ever ; of one like the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven, to whom is given an universal and everlasting dominion. If the new dispensation is represented as a more perfect mode of instruction, we read of a prophet upon whom should rest the spirit of wisdom and understanding. If it is styled the deliverance of captives, there is also a redeemer ; or victory, there is also a leader ; or a sacrifice, there is also an everlasting priest. The intimations of this extraordinary personage, so closely connected with the new dispensation, became more clear and pointed as the time of his coming approached : and there are predictions in Malachi and the later prophets, which in their direct primary sense can belong to no other but the Messiah. “ Behold,” says God by Malachi, “ I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me ; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple ; even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in.” And again, “ Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet,

* Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

before the great and dreadful day of the Lord." * Even Grotius, whose principle it was, in his exposition of the Old Testament, to seek for the primary sense of the prophecies in the Jewish affairs which were immediately under the eye of the prophet, and to consider their application to Jesus as a secondary sense, and who has often been misled by this principle into very forced interpretations, has not been able to assign any other meaning to these prophecies, with which the Old Testament concludes, and with a repetition of which Mark begins his Gospel, than that Malachi, with whom the prophetic spirit ceased, gave notice that it should be resumed in John the forerunner of the Messiah, who in the spirit and the power of Elias, should prepare the way before the messenger of the covenant.

The first answer then to Mr. Collins is, that there are in the Old Testament direct prophecies of the dispensation of the Gospel, and of the Messiah.

The second answer is, that prophecies applicable to Jesus only in a typical and secondary sense are not fanatical or unscholastic.

We are taught by the Apostle Paul to consider all the ceremonies of the law as types of the more perfect and spiritual dispensation of the Gospel. The meats, the drinks, the washings, the institution of the Levitical priesthood, the paschal lamb, and the other sacrifices, were figures for the time then present, shadows of good things to come, a rough draught, as the word type properly imports, of the blessings of that better covenant which the law au-

* Malachi iii. 1, 4, 5.

nounced. Many actions and incidents in the lives of eminent persons under the law are held forth as types of the Christ; and by the application which is made in the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles, of various passages in the Old Testament, we are led to consider many prophecies, which originally had, both in the intention of the speaker and in the sense of the hearers, a reference only to Jewish affairs, and were then interpreted by that reference, as receiving their full accomplishment in the events of the Gospel. This is what we mean by the double sense of prophecy. The seventy-second psalm is an example. It is the paternal blessing given by David in his dying moments to Solomon, when with the complacency of an affectionate father and a good prince, he looks forward to that happiness which his people were to enjoy under the peaceful reign of his son. But while he contemplates this great and pleasing object, he is led by the spirit to look beyond it, to that illustrious descendant whose birth he had been taught to expect,—that branch which in the latter days was to spring out of the root of Jesse. The two objects blend themselves together in his imagination; at least the words in which he pours forth his conceptions, although suggested by the promise concerning Solomon, are much too exalted when applied to the occurrences even of his distinguished reign, and were fulfilled only in the nature and the extent of the blessings conveyed by the Gospel. Had we no warrant from authority upon other accounts respectable, to bring this secondary sense out of some prophecies; or had we no prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament of another kind, it would be unfair and

unscholastical reasoning to infer that Jesus is the Messiah, because some passages may be thus transferred to him. We rest the argument from prophecy upon those predictions which expressly point to the Messiah, and upon that authority which the miracles of Jesus and his apostles gave to them as interpreters of prophecy: and we say that when their interpretation of those prophecies which were originally applicable to other events, gives to every expression in them a natural and complete sense, and at the same time coincides with the spirit of those predictions concerning the Gospel which are direct, we have the best reason for receiving this further meaning, not to the exclusion of the other, but as the full exposition of the words of the prophet.

There is nothing in the nature of prophecy, or the general use of language, inconsistent with this account of the matter. If you allow that prophecy is a thing possible, you must admit that "it came not by the will of man, but that holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Prophecy by its nature is distinguished from other kinds of discourse. At other times, men utter sentiments which they feel; they relate facts which they know; they reason according to the measure of their faculties. But when they prophesy, that is, when they declare, by the inspiration of God, events which are out of the reach of human foresight, they speak not of themselves; they are but the vehicles for conveying the mind of another Being; they pronounce the words which he puts into their mouth; and whether these words be intelligible or not, or what their full meaning may be, depends

not upon them, but upon Him from whom the words proceed. It is thus clearly deducible from the nature of prophecy, that there might be in the predictions of the Old Testament, a further meaning than that which was distinctly presented to the minds of those who spake. And we may conceive, that as the high priest Caiaphas was directed in the Jewish council to employ words which, although in his eyes they contained only a political advice, were really a prophecy of the benefits resulting from the death of Christ,* so the spirit of God might introduce into predictions, which to those who uttered them seemed to respect only the present fortune of their country, or the fate of some illustrious personage, expressions, in a certain sense indeed, applicable to them, but pointing to a more important event, and a more glorious personage, in whom it was to appear at a future period that they were literally fulfilled.

As there is nothing in the nature of prophecy inconsistent with that account of types and secondary senses which constitutes our second answer to the objection of Mr. Collins, so this account is supported by the general use of language. And any person versant in that use, will not be disposed to call the application of types and secondary prophecies unscholastic. The typical nature of the Jewish ritual accords with that most ancient method of conversing by actions, that kind of symbolical language, which is adopted in early times from the scantiness of words, which is retained in advanced periods of so-

* John xi. 49.

ciety, in order to give energy and beauty to speech, which abounds in the writings of the Jewish prophets, and appears to have been in familiar and universal use through all the regions adjoining to Judea. In like manner, prophecies which admit of two senses, one immediate and obvious, the other remote and hidden, are agreeable to that allegory which is only the symbolical language appearing in an extended discourse. Both sacred and profane poets afford beautiful examples of allegory. In the 14th Ode of the first book of Horace, the poet, under a concern for the safety of his friends at sea in a shattered bark, contrives at the same time to convey his apprehensions concerning the issue of the new civil war. There is a finished allegory, in the 80th Psalm. And Dr. Warburton has pointed out a prophecy in the two first chapters of Joel, where the prophet, he says, in his prediction of an approaching ravage by locusts, foretels likewise, in the same words, a succeeding desolation by the Assyrian army. For, as some of the expressions mark death by insects, and others desolation by war, both senses must be admitted. Allegory abounds in all the moral writings of antiquity, and is employed at some times as an agreeable method of communicating knowledge, and at other times as a cover for that which was too refined for vulgar eyes. There is not any particular reason for saying that it was unworthy of God to accommodate the style of many of his prophecies to this universal use of allegory; because, whenever the Almighty condescends to speak to us, whether he uses plain or figurative language, he must speak after the manner of men; and we are able to assign a most important purpose which was

attained by those prophecies of a double sense, the interpretation of which, although very far from deserving the name of unscholastic, may be called allegorical. It pleased God, in the intermediate space between the first predictions of the Messiah and the fulfilment of them, to establish the Jewish economy, an institution singular in its nature, and limited in its extent. This intermediate institution being for many ages a theocracy, there arose a succession of prophets by whom the intercourse between the Almighty Sovereign and his people was maintained; and the whole administration of the affairs of the Jews was long conducted by the prophets. It was natural for this succession of prophecy to give some notice of the better covenant which was to be made; and accordingly, we can trace predictions of the Messiah from the books of Moses, till the cessation of the prophetic spirit in Malachi. The Holy Ghost, by whom the prophet spoke, could have rendered these notices of the spiritual and universal nature of the future dispensation clear and intelligible to every one who heard them. But, in this case, the intermediate preparatory dispensation would have been despised. The Jews comparing their burdensome ritual with the simplicity of Gospel worship,—their imperfect sacrifices with the efficacy of the great atonement,—their temporal rewards with the crown of glory laid up in heaven, would have thrown off the yoke which they were called to bear; and those rudiments by which the law was given to train their minds for the perfect instruction of the Gospel, would have been cast away as “beggarly elements.” If the law served any purpose, it was necessary that it should be respected and observed so

long as it was to subsist; and therefore it would have been inconsistent with the wisdom of Him from whom it proceeded, that it should impart such a degree of light as might have destroyed itself. Enough was to be declared to raise and cherish an expectation of that which was to come, but not enough to disparage the things that then were. This end is most perfectly attained by the types, and the prophecies of a double sense which are contained in the Old Testament. Both were so agreeable to the manners of the times, and both received such a degree of explication from the direct prophecies concerning the Messiah, that there was an universal apprehension of their further meaning. Yet their immediate importance preserved the respect which was due to the law; and when, in the end of the age of prophecy, predictions of the Messiah were given by different prophets which could not apply to any other person,—these direct predictions were clothed in a figurative language, all the figures of which were borrowed from the law. The law, in this way, was still magnified; and as the child is kept under tutors and governors till the time appointed of the father, so says the apostle to the Galatians, the Jews were kept under the law, the guardians of the oracles of God,—the depositaries of the hopes of mankind, until the time came that the faith should be revealed.* When it was revealed, then the allegory received its interpretation; the significancy of the types, the reddition of the parables, the hidden meaning of the ancient prophecies, and the propriety of the figures in which the latter were clothed, all

* Gal. iv.

now stand forth to the admiration and conviction of the Christian world. What was a hyperbole in its application to Jewish affairs, becomes, says Dr. Warburton, plain speech, or an obvious metaphor, when transferred to the Gospel; and the Old Testament appears to have been, what St. Austin calls it, a continued prophecy of the New.

SECTION IV.

BEFORE I proceed to state the amount of the argument from prophecy, there is one other objection to that argument which requires to be mentioned. The objection arises from a kind of verbal criticism, but does not deserve upon that account to be dismissed as unimportant.

It was long ago observed, that many of the passages quoted from the Old Testament in the New, do not exactly agree with the text of our copies of the Old Testament. The apology commonly made for this difference was, that our Lord and his apostles did not quote from the Hebrew, but from the Septuagint translation, which was known and respected in Judea. But, upon accurate investigation, it was found that the quotations do not always correspond with the Septuagint; and that there are many which agree neither with the Septuagint nor with the Hebrew. It was insinuated, therefore, by the adversaries of Christianity, that our Lord and his apostles had not been scrupulous in their method of quoting

the Old Testament ; but wishing to ground Christianity upon Judaism, and finding it difficult to lay this foundation with the materials that existed, had accommodated the words of the Old Testament to their argument, and made the prophets say what it was necessary for the conclusiveness of that argument, they should seem to say. It appears at first sight very unlikely that our Lord and his apostles, who began the preaching of the gospel from Judea, would, in the hearing of the Jews, use such liberty with the scriptures which were publicly read in those very synagogues where they were thus misquoted. The detection of the fraud was easy, or rather unavoidable, and must have been ruinous to the cause of Christianity. But however improbable it may seem that our Lord and his apostles should be guilty of such a fraud, the fact is undeniable, that the quotations in the New Testament do not always agree with the books from which they are taken ; and it remains with the friends of Christianity to account for this fact. Many zealous Christians have thought it essential to the honour of that revelation granted to the Jews, to maintain the integrity of the original Hebrew text ; and even during the course of the last century, some men versant in Jewish learning argued most strenuously, that the Providence of God employed the vigilance of the Jewish nation, and certain precautions of the Jewish Rabbis to preserve the Hebrew text through all ages, from every degree of adulteration. Were this opinion sound, it does not appear to me that any satisfying account could be given of the difference between the Old Testament and the New, in those passages where the latter professes to quote the former. But as suspicions had

been long entertained that there were variations in the Hebrew text, so the opinion of those who maintain its integrity, was in the last century completely refuted by the labours of Dr. Kennicott, who, from a collation of six hundred manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, has demonstrated that there have been numberless small alterations, and some of considerable importance. We found formerly that the various readings of the Greek text of the New Testament arose from the ignorance or carelessness of transcribers, and that their being permitted could easily be reconciled with the wisdom of God, and the divine original of Christianity. We need not be surprised to find the same causes producing similar effects with regard to the Hebrew text. It has been said, that particular circumstances may naturally lead us to look for a greater number of such varieties in the Hebrew text than in the Greek; and there is much reason to suspect that both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint translation were wilfully corrupted by the Jews after the days of our Saviour, in order to elude the argument which the Christians deduced from the clear application of Jewish prophecies to him. We know that, in the second century, another Greek translation of the Old Testament, by Aquila, more inaccurate, and designedly throwing a veil over many prophecies of the Messiah, was substituted by the Jews in place of the Septuagint. Taking then the learned men who have devoted themselves to this study as our guides, and resting in the conclusions which they have established by a laborious induction of particulars, we say, that the copies both of the Hebrew text and of the Septuagint, which were in use in the

days of our Saviour, were more correct than those which we now have ; that by the help of many manuscripts, and of the Samaritan Pentateuch, which was much less corrupted than the books of Moses in Hebrew, the true reading of the Hebrew has been discovered in many places where it had been vitiated ; and that the honour of our Lord and his apostles has been fully vindicated ; for it appears that they quoted from the Septuagint when the sense of the author was there clearly expressed ; that, at other times, they translated the original for themselves, or used some translation more perfect than the Septuagint, and that there are many places in which their quotations, although different from the Hebrew that is now read, agree exactly with the Hebrew text, as by sound criticism it may be restored.

Such is the important service which sound criticism has rendered to religion. The unbeliever triumphed for a season in an objection which was plausible, because the answer to it was misapprehended or unknown. But the progress of investigation has unfolded the truth, and has placed, in the most conspicuous light, the fidelity and accuracy of the quotations made by those who grounded Christianity upon Judaism.

SECTION V.

HAVING thus cleared the way, by settling every preliminary point, and removing the objections which appear to me the strongest, I come to state concisely

ly the argument from prophecy, or the nature of that support which the truth of Christianity derives from the coincidence between the appearance of Jesus, and the predictions of the Old Testament.

In stating this argument, we allow that there are passages quoted by our Lord and his apostles from the Old Testament, in which there is merely an accommodation of words that had been spoken in one sense, to another sense, in which they are equally true. When it is said, in the second chapter of Matthew, "Joseph took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, out of Egypt have I called my Son," nothing more is meant by the expression, "that it might be fulfilled," and the idiom of ancient languages does not require any thing more to be understood, than that the words which in Hosea are applied to Israel, whom God calls his Son, received another meaning when he who is truly the Son of God, was brought out of the same place from which Israel came. We allow that it does not follow, from the possibility of this accommodation, that Hosea meant to foretell the future transference of his words, any more than that he who first enunciated a proverbial saying, foresaw all the particular occasions upon which it might be fitly applied. We admit, further, that the secondary sense of those prophecies in which we say the Messiah was included, and the typical nature of those ceremonies or actions which prefigured him, are not always obvious upon the consideration of particular prophecies or types. Nay, we admit that there is a degree of obscurity or doubt with regard

to some of those prophecies in which the Messiah is directly foretold ; and, therefore, the argument does not depend upon the clearness of any single prophecy, or upon the interpretation which may be given to this or that passage, but it arises from a connected view of the direct predictions, the secondary prophecies, and the types, as supporting and illustrating one another. Allow as much as any rational inquirer can allow to the shrewdness of conjecture, to accidental coincidence, and to human preparation, still the induction of particulars that cannot be accounted for by any of those means, is so complete and so striking, as to constitute a plain incontrovertible argument.

From the exact fulfilment of predictions extending through many centuries, uttered by different prophets, with different imagery, yet pointing to one train of events, and marking a variety of circumstances, in their nature the most contingent ; from the aptness of all the parts of the intermediate dispensation to shadow forth the blessings and the character of that ultimate dispensation which it announced, and from the sublime literal exposition which the events of the ultimate dispensation give to all those prophecies under the preparatory dispensation, which are expressed in language too exalted for the objects to which they were then applied ;—from these things laid together, there arises, to any person who considers them with due care, the most satisfying conviction that the whole scheme of Christianity was foreseen and foretold under the Old Testament. If you admit this position, there are two consequences which you will admit as flowing from it. The first is, that the prophets under the Old Testament were divinely inspired. The very means,

by which you attain a conviction that they prophesied of the gospel, render it manifest that the things foretold were beyond the reach of human sagacity ; and there is thus presented to us, in the fulfilment of their predictions, an evidence of the truth of the Mosaic dispensation as clear as that arising from the miracles performed by Moses before the children of Israel. The second consequence, and that which we are more immediately concerned in drawing, is this, that the scheme in which the predictions of those prophets were fulfilled is a divine revelation. In order to perceive how this consequence flows from the position which we have been establishing, you will attend to the two uses of prophecy, its immediate use in the ages in which it was given, and that further use which extends to the latest ages of the world. It is certain that prophecy ministered to the comfort, the instruction, and the hope of those who lived in the days of the prophets ; and we know, that the predictions respecting the Messiah were so far understood, as to excite in the whole nation of the Jews an expectation of the Messiah, and to cherish in just and devout men that state of mind, which is beautifully styled by Luke in the second chapter of his gospel, “ waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and “ looking for redemption in Jerusalem.” But that this was not the whole intention of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, appears indisputably from hence, that, according to the account which has been given of these prophecies, they contain a further provision than was necessary for that end. There were many parts of them which were not understood at that time, but were left to be unfolded to the age which was to behold their fulfilment. As

such parts were useless to the age which received the prophecy, we must believe that, if they had any use, they were designed for that future age, and that the prophets, as the apostle Peter speaks, “ministered not unto themselves, but unto us, the things which are now reported by them that have preached the gospel.”*

Bishop Sherlock wrote his admirable discourses on the use and intent of prophecy in the several ages of the world, to show that prophecy was intended chiefly for the support of faith and religion in the old world, as faith and religion could not have existed in any age after the fall without this extraordinary support; and he has been led, by an attachment to his own system, to express himself in some places of his book to the disparagement of the further use of prophecy. Yet even Bishop Sherlock admits, that prophecy may be of great advantage to future ages, and says that it was not unworthy of the wisdom of God to enclose, from the days of old in the words of prophecy, a secret evidence which he intended the world should one day see. The Bishop has stated in these few words, with his wonted energy and facility of expression, that further use of prophecy of which I am speaking. It is merely a dispute about words, whether the laying up this secret evidence was the primary or the secondary intention of the Giver of prophecy. But it is plain, that when all the notices of the first coming of Christ, that were communicated to different nations, are brought together into our view, and explained by the event, they illustrate, in the most striking manner, both the truth and the importance of Christianity. The gospel appears to be

* 1 Peter i. 12.

not a solitary unrelated part of the divine economy, but the purpose which God purposed from the beginning; and Jesus comes according to the declared counsel of heaven to do the will of his Father. The miracles which he wrought derive a peculiar confirmation, from being the very works which ancient prophets had foretold as characteristical of the Messiah. Prophecy and miracle, in this way, lend their aid to one another, and give the most complete assurance which can be desired, that there is no deception: for as miracles could not have justified the claim of Jesus to the character of Messiah, unless ancient predictions had been fulfilled in him, so the miracles which he wrought were an essential part of that fulfilment; and hence arises the peculiar significance and force of that answer which he made to the disciples of John, when they asked him, “Art thou he that should come?” “Go,” said he, “and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” He refers to his miracles; but he mentions them in the very words of Isaiah, thus conjoining with that divine wisdom which shines in all his discourses, the two great arguments by which his disciples in all succeeding ages were to defend their faith. The internal evidence, too, arising from the nature of his undertaking, is very much heightened, when we see that that undertaking was the completion of the plan of Providence. We are often able to vindicate and explain the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, by referring to the manner in which they were sketched out by the preparatory dispensation; and the intimate connection

of the two systems, which enables us to give a satisfactory account of the peculiarities of the law, reflects much dignity upon the gospel. While the kingdoms of this world are spoken of only in so far as the kingdom of the Messiah was to be affected by their fate, we see the servants of the Almighty preparing the way for the Prince of Peace; the continued effusion of the divine Spirit does honour to Jesus; the prophets arise in long succession to bear witness to him; and our respect for the sundry intimations of the will of heaven, is concentrated in reverence for that scheme towards which all of them tend. In the magnificence of that provision which ushered in the gospel, we recognise the majesty of God; in the continuity and nice adjustment of its parts, we trace his wisdom; and its increasing light is analogous to that gradual preparation, by which all the works of God advance to maturity.

Such is the support which the truth of Christianity derives from the predictions of the Old Testament respecting the Messiah. The argument from prophecy, therefore, was not, as Mr. Gibbon sarcastically and incorrectly says, merely addressed to the Jews as an *argumentum ad hominem*. To those to whom the books of the Old Testament are known chiefly if not entirely by the references made to them in the gospel, it affords much confirmation to their faith, and much enlargement of their views with regard to Christianity.

Prideaux — Hartley — Gray — Prettyman's Institutes — Stillingfleet's Orig. Sacre — Chandler — Hurd — Warburton — Newton — Law — Sykes — Kennicott — Randolph's Collation — Geddes's Prospectus — Lowth de Sacra Poesi — Horne's Preface to Commentary on the Psalms.

CHAP. VII.

PREDICTIONS DELIVERED BY JESUS.

THE support of which we have hitherto spoken proceeds upon those prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, which were fulfilled by his appearing in the flesh. But a due attention to the subject leads us much further, and we soon perceive that the birth of Christ, important and glorious as that event was, far from exhausting the significations given by the ancient prophets, only served to introduce other events most interesting to the human race, which were also foretold, which reach to the end of time, and which, as they arise in the order of Providence, are fitted to afford an increasing evidence of the truth of Christianity.

In entering upon this wide field of argument, which here opens to our view, I think it of importance to direct your attention to the admirable economy with which the prophecies of the Old Testament are disposed. They may be divided into two great classes, as they respect either the temporal condition of the Jews and their neighbours, or that future spiritual dispensation which was to arise in the latter days.

As the whole administration of the affairs of the Jews was for many ages conducted by prophecy, there are, in the Old Testament, numberless predictions concerning the temporal condition of themselves

and their neighbours. Some of these predictions were to be fulfilled in a short time, so that the same persons who heard the prophecy saw the event. This near fulfilment of some predictions procured credit for others respecting more distant events. "Behold," said the Almighty to the nation of the Jews, "the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare. Before they spring up, I tell you of them." * There are prophecies of the temporal condition of nations, which are at this day fulfilling in the world. The present state of Babylon, of Tyre, of Egypt, of the descendants of Ishmael, and of the Jewish people themselves, have been shown by learned men, and particularly by Bishop Newton, to correspond exactly to the words of ancient prophets : and thus, as the experience of the Jewish nation taught them to expect every event which their prophets announced, so the visible continued accomplishment of what these prophets spoke two or three thousand years ago is to us a standing demonstration that they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

But this whole system of prophecy was merely a vehicle for preserving and conveying to the world the hopes of a future spiritual dispensation. It embraced indeed the temporal affairs of the Jews, and of the nations with whom they were particularly connected, because an intermediate preparatory dispensation was established till the better hope should be brought in. But all the prophecies of temporal good and evil were subservient to the promise of the Messiah, and the fulfilment of those prophecies cherished among the nation of the Jews the expectation

* Isaiah xlii. 9.

of that future covenant which was the end of the law. The birth of the Messiah justified this expectation. It did not indeed accomplish all the words of the prophets, but it brought assurance that there should be, in due time, a complete accomplishment. Several great events happened soon after the birth of the Messiah, according to the ancient Scriptures. Other instances of fulfilment are at this day seen in the religious state of the world, and there are parts of the prophecy yet to be fulfilled. We are thus placed in the middle of a great scheme, of which we have seen the beginning and the progress. The conclusion remains to be unfolded. But the correspondence to the words of the prophets both in the events which are past, and in the present state of things, may establish our hope that the mystery of God will be finished ; and the succession of events, as they open in the course of Providence upon the generations of men, gradually explains those parts of the prophecy which were not understood.

The prophecies of the temporal state of Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, and other nations which are now fulfilling in the world, are so clear, that any one versant in history may compare the event with the prediction—and I do not know a more pleasing, satisfactory book for this purpose than Newton on the Prophecies. But the prophecies of those events in the spiritual state of the world, which were to happen after the birth of the Messiah, are in general short and obscure ; and although any person who is capable of considering the scheme of ancient prophecy, may be satisfied of its looking forward to the end of all things, yet without some assistance it would be impossible for him to form a distinct

conception of what was to follow the birth of the Messiah, and difficult even to refer events as they arise, to their place in the prediction. This kind of obscurity was allowed by God to remain upon the ancient predictions respecting the future fortunes of the Messiah's kingdom, because a remedy was to arise in due time by the advent of that great Prophet who, having fulfilled in his appearance one part of those predictions, became the interpreter of that which remains. The miracles by which he showed that he was a messenger of heaven, and the exact coincidence between the history of his life, and the characters of the Jewish Messiah, were sufficient to procure credit for his interpretation. He was worthy to take the book which Daniel had said was sealed till the time of the end, to open the seals of it, and to explain to the nations of the earth the words which were shut up therein. Thus Jesus stands forth not only as the personage whom ancient prophets had foretold, but as himself a Prophet. The same spirit which had moved them, but whose significations of future events had ceased with Malachi, speaks by that messenger of the covenant whom Malachi had announced, and upon whom Isaiah had said the spirit of the Lord should rest : and there is opened in the discourses of Jesus and the writings of his apostles, a series of predictions explicatory of the dark parts of ancient prophecy, and extending to the consummation of all things.

It is not possible to conceive a more perfect unity of design than that which we have now traced in the system of prophecy ; and every human scheme fades and dwindles when compared with the magnificence and extent of this plan—Jesus Christ the corner-

stone which connects the old and the new dispensation ; in whom one part of the ancient predictions received its accomplishment, and from whom the other received its interpretation. The spirit of prophecy thus ministers in two distinct methods to the evidence of Christianity. It enclosed in the words and actions of the Old Testament a proof that Jesus was that person whom the Father had sanctified, and sent into the world ; and it holds forth, in the words uttered by Jesus and his apostles, that mark of a divine mission, which all impostors have assumed, and which mankind have often ascribed to those who did not possess it, but which, where it really exists, may be easily distinguished from all false pretensions, and is one of the evidences which the Almighty hath taught us to look for in every messenger of his. He claims it as his prerogative to declare the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that shall be ; he challenges the gods of the nations to give this proof of their divinity ; “ Produce your cause, saith the Lord : bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.” * And he hath given this mark of his messengers : “ When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him.” †

As Jesus assumed this universal character of a divine messenger, so he was distinguished from other prophets by the clearness, the extent, and the importance of his predictions. And he showed that the spirit was given to him without measure, by exercis-

* Isaiah xli. 21, 23 ; xlv. 9, 10.

† Jer. xxviii. 9.

ing the gift of prophecy upon subjects very different from one another, both in their nature, and in their times. He foretold events which seem to be regulated by the caprice of men, and those which depend purely upon the will of God. He foretold some events so near, that we find in Scripture both the prophecy and the fulfilment ; others which took place a few years after the canon of Scripture was closed, with regard to which we learn the complete fulfilment of the prophecy from contemporary historians ; others which are now carrying forward in the world, with regard to which the fulfilment of the prophecy is a matter of daily observation ; and others which reach to distant periods, and to the consummation of all things, which are still the objects of a Christian's hope, but with regard to which, hope rises to perfect assurance by the recollection of what is past.

This is a general view of the prophecies of Jesus and his apostles ; and I recommend them to your particular attention and study, because, in my opinion, the evidence of Christianity derives two great advantages from the study of them. The *first* advantage arises from their appearing to be the explication and enlargement of the short obscure predictions contained in the Old Testament with regard to the same events ; such an explication as no other person was qualified to give, and therefore as clear a demonstration of the prophetic spirit of Jesus as if he had uttered a series of predictions perfectly new, yet such an explication as illustrates the intimate connection of the two dispensations. The prophecies of Jesus and his apostles, while they introduce many particulars that are not found in the writings

of the ancient prophets, are always consistent with the words spoken by them, referring to their images, and unfolding their dark sayings. The highest honour is, in this way, reflected upon the extent of the scheme of ancient prophecy; and Jesus, by honouring this scheme, and carrying it forward, confirms his claim to the character of Jewish Messiah, because he speaks in a manner most becoming that great Prophet, who was to be raised up like unto Moses. The *second* advantage arising from a particular study of the predictions of Jesus, is this, that all the events, which constitute the history of his religion, thus appear to be the fulfilment of prophecy. Besides the support which every one of them in its place gives to the truth of Christianity, all together unite as parts of a system, which had entered into the mind of the Author of our religion, and when they happen, they afford a demonstration that the God of knowledge had put words into his mouth.

To perceive distinctly the nature and the importance of this secondary advantage, the four Gospels should be read from beginning to end, with a special view to mark the prophecies of Jesus. In doing this, you will set down the many instances in which he discovers a knowledge of the human heart, of the intentions and thoughts of both his friends and his enemies, as of the same order with the gift of prophecy. You will find predictions of common occurrences, and near events, which must have made a deep impression upon those who lived with him; and, scattered through all his discourses, you will meet with predictions of remote events, for which the fulfilment of the predictions of near events was fitted to procure credit. Out of the many particulars

which, upon such a review, may engage your attention, I select the following important objects, as affording a specimen of the variety of our Saviour's prophecies, and of the manner in which those events which constitute the history of his religion, may be considered as the fulfilment of his predictions; the prophecies of his death, of his resurrection, of the gift of the Holy Ghost, of the situation and behaviour of his disciples, of the destruction of Jerusalem, of the progress of his religion previous to that period, of the condition of the Jewish nation subsequent to it, and of the final discrimination of the righteous and the wicked.

1. The death of Jesus, that great event which, when considered in the Scripture view of it, is characteristic of the Gospel as the religion of sinners, is the subject of many of our Lord's prophecies. He marks, without hesitation, the time, the place, and the manner of it; the treachery of one disciple, the denial of another, the desertion of the rest, the sentence of condemnation which the supreme council of the Jewish nation, at a time when Jews were gathered from all corners of the land, was to pronounce in Jerusalem upon an innocent man, whom many of the people held to be a prophet, and the execution of that sentence by the Gentiles, to whom the rulers of the Jews, jealous as they were of their own authority, and indignant under the Roman yoke, were to deliver the pannel. But of all the kinds of death which might have been inflicted, the prophecy of Jesus selects one unknown in the land of Judea, and reserved by the Romans for slaves, who, having been distinguished from freemen in their life, were distinguished also in the manner of their death. It is not

possible to conceive any events more contingent than those which this prophecy embraces. Yet it was literally fulfilled. When you examine it attentively, there are several particulars which you will be delighted with marking, because they constitute an indirect support to the truth of Christianity, arising out of the contexture of the prophecy. Thus, you will find that the prophecy applies to Jesus many minute circumstances in the Jewish types of the Messiah, and in this way shows us that as the death of the Messiah had been shadowed forth by the sacrifices of the law, and foretold by Isaiah and Daniel, so the manner of it had, from the beginning, been in the view of the spirit of prophecy, and was signified beforehand in various ways. You will admire the magnanimity of that man who came into the world that he might lay down his life, and who never courted the favour of the people, or shrunk from the discharge of any duty, although all the circumstances of barbarity that marked his death were fully before his eyes. You will admire the dignity, and the regard to the peace of his country, which restrained Jesus from raising the pity and indignation of the multitude by publishing his future sufferings to them, and which led him to address all the clear minute predictions of his death to his disciples in private. You will admire the tenderness and wisdom with which he delayed any such communication even to them, till they had declared a conviction of his being the Messiah, and then gradually unfolded the dismal subject as they were able to bear it; and you will perceive the gracious purpose which was promoted by the growing particularity of his prophecy, as the event drew near. "Now," says he, "I tell

you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he." *

2. The circumstances of his death, every one of which had been foretold by himself, thus served to procure credit for that prophecy of his resurrection, which was always conjoined with them. The ancient prophets had declared that the Messiah was to live for ever; and as both Isaiah and Daniel, who spoke of his everlasting kingdom, had spoken also of his being cut off out of the land of the living, their words implied that he was to rise from the dead. This implication of a resurrection was brought out by our Lord. Conscious of the divine power which dwelt in him, he said that on the third day he should rise again; and in the hearing of all the people, he held forth Jonas as a type of himself. The people recollected his words as soon as he was put to death, for "the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again:" † and they vainly employed precautions to prevent the fulfilment of his prophecy. The apostles have left a most natural picture of their own weakness and disappointment, by transmitting it upon record to posterity, that the death of Jesus effaced from their minds his promise of rising again, or at least destroyed in the interval their faith of its being fulfilled. But you will find that both the angels who appeared to the women, and our Lord in his discourses with the disciples, recalled the prophecy to their minds: and, by one expression of John, you may judge of the confirmation which their

* John xiii. 19.

† Matt. xxvii. 62, 63.

faith was to receive from the recollection of predictions which had been addressed to themselves, and the fulfilment of which they had seen. When the Jews asked a sign of him, he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews understood him to mean the temple in which they were standing. "But he spake," says John, "of the temple of his body. When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said." * There is no fact in the history of the Christian religion more important than the resurrection of Jesus. It is that seal of his commission, without which all the others are of none avail; the assurance to us that the purpose of his death is accomplished, and the pledge of our resurrection. "If Christ be not risen, our faith is vain." As the evidence of the fact therefore will appear to us, when we proceed to examine it, to be most particular and satisfying, so it was most natural that this very important fact should be the subject of prophecy.

3. Our Lord foretold also that he was to ascend into heaven; and the fulfilment of this prophecy was made an object of sense to the apostles as far as their eyes could reach. But that they might be satisfied there was no illusion, and that the rest of the world might know assuredly that he was gone to the Father, the prophecy of this ascension was connected with the promise of the Holy Ghost, which he said he would send from his Father to comfort the disciples after his departure, to qualify them for preach-

* John ii. 18—22.

ing his religion, and to ensure the success of their labours. You learn from the book of Acts the fulfilment of this promise ; and, when you examine the subject, the following circumstances will deserve your attention. The miraculous gifts poured forth on the day of Pentecost are stated by the apostle Peter as “ that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.” * The last days is a prophetical expression for the age of the Messiah, which was to succeed the age of the law. It is plain that the prophecy of Joel had not been fulfilled before the day of Pentecost ; for during the greater part of the time that had elapsed between the word of Joel and that day, the prophetical spirit had ceased entirely. His word did receive a visible fulfilment upon that day ; and this fulfilment being an event which our Lord had taught his apostles to look for, Peter was entitled to apply the word of Joel to the event which then took place ; and our Lord appears in his promise of the Holy Ghost, as in his other prophecies, to be the true interpreter of ancient predictions. Further, The promise of Jesus does not respect merely the inward influences of the Spirit. These, however essential to the comfort and improvement of man, do not admit of being clearly proved to others, either by the testimony of sense, or by the deductions of reason, and cannot always be distinguished by certain marks from the visions of fanatical men. But the promise of Jesus expresses precisely external visible works, to which the power of imagination does not reach, and with regard to

* Acts ii. 16, 17.

which every spectator may attain the same assurance as with regard to any other object of sense. "These signs," said Jesus before his ascension, "shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and, if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."* It limits a time, within which the faculty of performing such works was to be conferred; and it chooses the most public place as the scene of their being exhibited. For Jesus, just before he was taken up into heaven, "commanded his apostles that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which," saith he, "ye have heard of me; ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."† Lastly, You will be led by the examination of this subject to observe, that when the works performed, in consequence of the gifts conferred upon the day of Pentecost, became palpable to the senses of men, they were, like the miracles of Jesus, the vouchers of a divine commission. Being performed in his name, and in fulfilment of his promise, they were fitted to convince the world that he had received power from the Father after his ascension, and that he had given this power to his apostles. These men were, in this way, recommended to the world as sent by Jesus to carry forward the great scheme which he had opened. Full credit was procured for all that they taught, because their works were the signs of those internal operations by which they were inspired with the knowledge, wisdom, and

* Mark xvi. 17, 18.

† Acts i. 4, 5.

fortitude necessary for their undertaking ; and their works were also the pledges of the fulfilment of that promise which extends to true Christians in all ages, that the Holy Spirit shall be given to those who ask it, according to the measure of their necessities.

4. The fourth subject of our Lord's prophecies which I mentioned, was the situation and the behaviour of his apostles after he should leave them. He never amused them with false hopes ; he forewarned them of all the scorn, and hatred, and persecution which they were to expect in preaching his religion : and yet, although he had daily experience of their timidity, and slowness of apprehension, although he foretold that at his death they would forsake him, yet he foretold with equal assurance, that after his ascension they should be his witnesses to the ends of the earth ; and he left in the hands of these feeble men, who were to be involved in calamities upon his account, that cause for which he had lived and died, without expressing any apprehension that it would suffer by their weakness. " If ye were of the world," he says in his last discourse to them before his death, " the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. They shall put you out of the synagogues ; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." * There is in all this a dignity of manner, and a consciousness of divine resources,

* John xv. 19 ; xvi. 2, 3, 4.

which exalts Jesus above every other person that appears in history. When we see in the propagation of his religion, the fortitude, the wisdom, and the eloquence of his servants, their steadfastness amidst trials sufficient to shake the firmest minds, and the joy which they felt in being counted worthy to suffer for his name, we remember his words, and we discern the fruits of that baptism, wherewith they were baptized on the day of Pentecost. In a heroism, so different from the former conduct of these men, and so manifestly the gift of God, we recognise the spirit which both dictated the prophecy, and brought about the event; and our Lord's prediction of the situation and behaviour of his apostles, when thus compared with the event, furnishes the most striking illustration of his truth, his candour, his knowledge, and his power.

5. We come now to the longest and most circumstantial of our Lord's prophecies. It respects immediately the destruction of Jerusalem; but we shall find that it embraces also the remaining subjects of prophecy which I mentioned, and, in speaking of them, I mean to follow it as my guide.

The prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem was uttered at a time when Judea was in complete subjection to the Romans. A Roman governor resided in Jerusalem with an armed force; and this state, no longer at enmity with the masters of the world, was regarded as a part of the Roman empire. There was, it is true, a general indignation at the Roman yoke, a tendency in the minds of the people to sedition and tumult, and a fear in the council lest these sentiments should at some time be expressed with such violence, as to provoke the Romans to take

away their place and their nation. It was, in fact, the turbulent spirit, and the repeated insurrections of the Jewish people, which did incense the Romans ; and a person well acquainted with the disaffection which generally prevailed, and the character of those who felt it, might foresee that the public tranquillity would not continue long, and that this sullen stiff-necked people were preparing for themselves, by their murmurings and violence, more severe chastisements than they had endured, when they were reduced into the form of a Roman province. But although a sagacious enlightened mind, which rose above vulgar prejudices, and looked forward to remote consequences, might foresee such an event, yet the manner of the chastisement, the signs which were to announce its approach, the measure in which it was to be administered, and the length of time during which it was to continue,—all these were out of the reach of human foresight. There is a particularity in this prophecy, by which it is clearly distinguished from the conjectures of wise men. It embraces a multitude of contingencies depending upon the caprice of the people, upon the wisdom of military commanders, upon the fury of soldiers. It describes one certain method of doing that which might have been done in many other ways, a method of subduing a rebellious city very different from the general conduct of the Romans, who were too wise to destroy the provinces which they conquered, and very opposite to the character of Titus the emperor, under whose command Jerusalem was besieged, one of the mildest and gentlest men that ever lived, who, placed at the head of the empire of the world, is called by historians, the love and delight of mankind. The

author of a new religion must have been careless of his reputation, and of the success of his scheme, who ventured to foretell such a number of improbable events without knowing certainly that they were to come to pass; and it required not the wisdom of a man, but the Spirit of the God of knowledge, to foresee that all of them would concur, before the generation that was then alive upon the earth passed away. Yet this prophecy Jesus uttered about forty years before the event. The prophecy was not laid up after it was uttered, like the pretended oracles of the heathen nations, in some repository, where it might be corrected by the event. But, having been brought to the remembrance of those who heard it spoken, by the spirit which Jesus sent into the hearts of his apostles after his ascension, it was inserted in books which were published before the time of the fulfilment. We know that John lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem, and it is not certain whether he wrote his Gospel before or after that event. But John has omitted this prophecy altogether. Our knowledge of it is derived from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which were carried by the Christian converts into all parts of the world while Jerusalem stood, which were early translated into different languages, which are quoted by writers in the succeeding age, and were universally held by the first Christians as books of authority, as the standards of faith. In these books thus authenticated to us, we find various intimations of the destruction of Jerusalem, by parables and short hints interwoven in the thread of the history; and all the three contain the same long particular prophecy, with a small variety of expression, but without the least discordance, or even alteration of the sense. The greatest part of

this long prophecy has been most strikingly fulfilled, and there are parts, the fulfilment of which is now going on in the world.

We learn the fulfilment of the greater part of this prophecy, not from Christian writers only, but from one author, whose witness is unexceptionable, because it is not the witness of a friend; and who seems to have been preserved by Providence, in order to transmit to posterity a circumstantial account of the siege. Josephus, a Jew, who wrote a history of his country, has left also a relation of that war in which Jerusalem was destroyed. In the beginning of the war, he was a commander in Galilee. But being besieged by Vespasian, he fled with forty more, after a gallant resistance, and hid himself in a cave. Vespasian having discovered their lurking place, offered them their life. Josephus was willing to accept it. But his companions refused to surrender. With a view to prolong the time, and in hopes of overcoming their obstinacy, he prevailed upon them to cast lots who should die first. The lots were cast two by two: and that God, who disposeth of the lot, so ordered it, that of the forty, thirty-nine were killed by the hands of one another, and one only was left with Josephus. This man yielded to his entreaties; and these two, instead of drawing lots who should kill the other, went together, and offered themselves to Vespasian. The miserable fate of their companions procured them a kind reception; and from that time Josephus remained in the Roman camp, an eye-witness of every thing that happened during the siege. He has the reputation of a diligent faithful historian in his other work. And his very particular account of the siege was revised by Vespasian and Titus, and

published by their order. The only impeachment that has ever been brought against the veracity of Josephus is, that, although his history of the Jews comprehends the period in which our Lord lived, he hardly makes mention of his name ; and, although exact and minute in every thing else, enters into no detail of the memorable circumstances that attended his appearance, or the influence which it had upon the minds of the people. He takes no notice of this prophecy. A Jewish priest, whose silence betrays his enmity to Jesus, certainly did not wish that it should be fulfilled : and yet his history of the siege is a comment upon the prophecy ; every word which our Lord utters receiving the clearest explication, and most plainly meeting its event in the narration of this prejudiced Jewish historian.

Archbishop Tillotson, Newton on the Prophecies, Lardner, Jortin, Newcome, and many other writers, have made very full extracts from Josephus, and, by setting the narration of the historian over against the prediction of our Lord, have shown the exact accomplishment of the words of the great Prophet, from the record of a man who did not acknowledge his divine mission. These extracts well deserve your study. But it is not necessary, after the labour which so many learned men have bestowed upon this subject, that I should lead you minutely through the parts of the prophecy. There are, however, some circumstances upon which I think it of importance to fix your attention. I mean, therefore, to give a distinct account of the occasion which led our Lord to utter this prophecy ; and, after collecting briefly the chief points respecting the siege, I shall dwell upon the striking prophecy of the progress of

Christianity before that period, which Matthew has preserved in his twenty-fourth chapter.

Our Lord had uttered in the temple, in the hearing of a mixed multitude, a pathetic lamentation over the distress that awaited the Jewish nation. As he goes out of the temple towards the mount of Olives, the usual place of his retirement, the disciples, struck with the severity of an expression he had used, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate," as if to move his compassion and mitigate the sentence, point out to him, while he passed along, the buildings of the temple, and the goodly stones and gifts with which it was adorned. The great temple which Solomon had built, was destroyed at the time of the Babylonish captivity. Cyrus permitted the two tribes, who returned to Judea, to rebuild the house of their God. And this second temple was repaired and adorned by Herod the Great, who, having received the crown of Judea from the Romans, thought that the most effectual way of overcoming the prejudices, and obtaining the favour of the Jewish people, was by beautifying and enlarging, after the plan of Solomon's temple, the building which had been hastily erected in the reigns of Cyrus and Darius. It was still accounted the second temple, but was so much improved by the reparation which Herod made, that both Josephus and the Roman historians celebrate the extent, the beauty, and the splendour, of the building. And Josephus mentions, in particular, marble stones of a stupendous size in the foundation, and in different parts of the building. The disciples, we may suppose, point out these stones, lamenting the destruction of such a fabric; or perhaps meaning to insinuate, that it would not be easy for

the hand of man to destroy it. But Jesus answered, "Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." It is a proverbial saying, marking the complete destruction of the temple ; and there would not, according to the general analogy of language, have been any impropriety in the use of it, if the temple had been rendered unfit for being a place of worship, although piles of stones had been left standing in the court. But, by the providence of God, even this proverbial expression was fulfilled, according to the literal acceptation of the words. Titus was most solicitous to preserve so splendid a monument of the victories of Rome ; and he sent a message to the Jews who had enclosed themselves in the temple, that he was determined to save it from ruin. But they could not bear that the house of their God, the pride and glory of their nation, should fall into the hands of the heathen, and they set fire to the porticoes. A soldier, observing the flames, threw a burning brand in at the window ; and others, incensed at the obstinate resistance of the Jews, without regard to the commands or threatenings of their General, who ran to extinguish the flames, continued to set fire to different parts of it, and at length even to the doors of the holy place. "And thus," says Josephus, "the temple was burnt to the ground, against the will of Titus." After it was in this way rendered useless, he ordered the foundations, probably on account of the unusual size of the stones, to be dug up. And Rufus, who commanded the army after his departure, executed this order, by tearing them up with a plough-share ; so truly did Micah say of old, "Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and

the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest.”*

The multitude probably pressing around our Lord as he went out of the temple, the disciples forbear to ask any particular explication of his words, till they come to the Mount of Olives. That mount was at no great distance from Jerusalem, and over against the temple, so that any person sitting upon it, had an excellent view of the whole fabric. The disciples, deeply impressed with what they had heard, and anxious to receive the fullest information concerning the fate of the city of their solemnities, now that they are retired from the multitude, come around Jesus upon the mount, and looking down to the temple, say, “Tell us, when shall these things be; and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”† It is of consequence that you form a clear apprehension of the import of this question. The end of the world, according to the use of that phrase to which our ears are accustomed, means the consummation of all things. And this circumstance, joined with some expressions in the prophecy, has led several interpreters to suppose that the apostles were asking the time of the judgment. But to a Jew, ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος, often conveyed nothing more than the end of the age. Time was divided by the Jews into two great periods, the age of the law and the age of the Messiah. The conclusion of the one was the beginning of the other, the opening of that kingdom which the Jews believed the Messiah was to establish, which was to put an end to their suf-

* Micah iii. 12.

† Matt. xxiv. 3.

ferings, and to render them the greatest people upon the earth. The apostles, full of this hope, said to our Lord, immediately before his ascension, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Our Lord used the phrase of his coming, to denote his taking vengeance upon the Jews by destroying their city and temple. "There be some standing here," he said, "that shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."* All that heard him are long since gathered to their fathers, and Jesus has not yet come to judge the world. But John, we know, survived the destruction of Jerusalem. There are two other places in the New Testament where a phrase almost the same with ἡ συντελεια του αιωνος occurs. And in neither does it signify what we call the end of the world. The apostle to the Hebrews, ix. 26, says, "But now once, ἐπι συντελειᾳ των αιωνων, hath Christ appeared." At the conclusion of that dispensation under which the blood of bulls and goats was offered upon the altar of God, "Christ appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The apostle to the Corinthians says, "These things are written for our admonition, upon whom are come τα τελη των αιωνων,"† our translation renders it "the ends of the world." Yet the world has lasted about 1800 years since the apostolic days; the meaning is, the ends of the ages, the conclusion of the one age, and the beginning of the other, are come upon us; for we have seen both.

It is agreeable, then, to the phrascology of Scripture, and to the expectations of the apostles, to in-

* Matt. xvi. 28.

† 1 Cor. x. 11.

interpret their question here, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" as meaning nothing more than the corresponding question, to which an answer, in substance the same, is given in the 13th chapter of Mark, and the 21st of Luke. What shall be the sign when these things, this prophecy of the destruction of the temple, shall be fulfilled, or come to pass? But the language in which the question is proposed in Matthew, suggests to us the sentiment which had probably arisen in the minds of the apostles, after hearing the declaration of our Lord, as they walked from the temple to the Mount of Olives. They conceived that the whole frame of the Jewish polity was to be dissolved, that the glorious kingdom of the Messiah was to commence, and that, as all the nations of the earth were to be gathered to this kingdom, and Jerusalem was to be the capital of the world, the temple which now stood, extensive and magnificent as it was, would be too small for the reception of the worshippers, that on this account it was to be laid in ruins, and one much more splendid, more suitable to the dignity of the Messiah, and far surpassing every human work, was to be erected in its stead. Possessed with these exalted imaginations, and anticipating their own dignity in being the ministers of this temple, they come to Jesus and say, "Tell us when these things shall be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?" The question consists of two parts. They ask the time, and they ask the signs. Our Lord begins with giving a particular answer to the second question. He afterwards limits the time to the existence of the generation then alive upon the

earth. But he represses their curiosity as to the day or the hour.

Of the signs mentioned by our Lord, I shall give a short general view, deriving the account of the fulfilment of his words from the history of the events left us by Josephus, and shall then fix your attention upon that prophecy of the general progress of Christianity before the destruction of Jerusalem, which you will find in the 24th chapter of Matthew.

The first sign is the number of false Christs who were to arise in the interval between the prophecy and the event; impostors who, finding a general expectation of the Messiah, as the seventy weeks of Daniel were conceived to be accomplished, and a disposition to revolt from the Romans, assumed a character corresponding to the wishes of the people. There is frequent reference to these impostors in the book of Acts; and Josephus says, that numbers of them were taken under the government of Felix. They led out the deluded people in crowds, promising to show them great signs, and to deliver them from all their calamities, and thus exposed them to be cut to pieces by the Roman soldiers, as disturbers of the peace. Our Lord graciously warns the apostles not to go after these men; to put no faith in any message which they pretended to bring from him, but to rest satisfied with the directions contained in this prophecy, or hereafter communicated to themselves by his Spirit. While he thus preserves his followers from the destruction which came upon many of the Jews, he enables them, by reading in that destruction the fulfilment of his words, and a proof of his divine character, to derive from the fate of their

unwise countrymen an early confirmation of their own faith.

The second sign consists of great calamities which were to happen during the interval. The madness of Caligula, who succeeded Tiberius, butchered many of the Jews; and there was in his reign the rumour of a war, which was likely to be the destruction of the nation. He ordered his statue to be erected in the temple of Jerusalem. Not conceiving why an honour, which was granted to him by the other provinces of the empire, should be refused by Judea; and not being wise enough to respect the religious prejudices of those who were subject to him, he rejected their remonstrances, and persisted in his demand. The Jews had too high a veneration for the house of the true God, to admit of any thing like divine honours being there paid to a mortal, and they resolved to suffer every distress, rather than to give their countenance to the sacrilege of the emperor. Such was the consternation which the rumour of this war spread through Judea, that the people neglected to till their lands, and in despair waited the approach of the enemy. But the death of Caligula removed their fears, and delayed for some time that destruction which he meditated. Although, therefore, says Jesus, you will find the Jews troubled when these wars arise, as if the end of their state was at hand, be not ye afraid, but know that many things must first be accomplished. What strength was the faith of the apostles to derive from this prophecy, but a few years after our Lord's death, when they heard of rumours of wars, when they beheld the despair of their countrymen, and yet saw the cloud dispelled, and the peace of

their country restored ! The peace, indeed, was soon interrupted by frequent engagements between the Jewish and heathen inhabitants of many cities in the province of Syria ; by disputes about the bounds of their jurisdiction, amongst the governors of the different tetrarchies or kingdoms into which the land of Palestine was divided ; and by the wars arising from the quick succession of emperors, and the violent competitions for the imperial diadem. It was not the sword only that filled with calamity this disastrous interval. The human race, according to the words of this prophecy, suffered under those judgments which proceed immediately from heaven. Josephus has mentioned famine and pestilence, earthquakes in all places of the world where Jews resided, and one in Judea attended with circumstances so dreadful and so unusual, that it was manifest, he says, the whole power of nature was disturbed for the destruction of men.

The third sign is the persecution of the Christians. The sufferings of which we read in the Epistles and the Acts were early aggravated by the famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes with which God at this time afflicted the earth. The Christians were regarded as the causes of these calamities ; and the heathen, without inquiring into the nature of their religion, but viewing it as a new pestilential superstition, most offensive to the gods, tried to appease the divine anger, which manifested itself in various judgments, by bringing every indignity and barbarity upon the Christians. The example was set by Nero, who, having in the madness of his wickedness set fire to Rome that he might enjoy the sight of a great city in flames, turned the tide

of that indignation, which the report excited, from himself against the Christians, by accusing them of this atrocious crime. He found the people not unwilling to believe any thing of a sect whom they held in abhorrence ; and both in this, and in many other instances, the Christians suffered the most exquisite torments for crimes not their own, and as the authors of calamities which they did not occasion. The persecution which they endured has been well called by one of the oldest apologists for Christianity,* a war against the name, proceeding not from hatred to them as individuals, but from enmity to the name which they bore. “ Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”

The fourth sign is the apostacy and treachery of many who had borne this name. Although persecution naturally tends to unite those who are persecuted, and although the religion of Jesus can boast of an innumerable company of martyrs, who, in the flames witnessed a good confession, yet there were some in the earliest ages who made shipwreck of faith, and endeavoured to gain the favour of the heathen magistrates by informing against their brethren. This apostacy is often severely reprehended in the epistles of Paul ; and the Roman historian speaks of a multitude of Christians who were convicted of bearing the name, upon the evidence of those who confessed first.† It cannot surprise any one who considers the weakness of human nature, that such examples did occur. But it must appear very much to the honour of Jesus, that he adventures to utter such a prophecy. He is not

* Justin Martyr.

† Tac. Ann. xv. 44.

afraid of sowing jealousy and distrust amongst his followers. He knew that many were able to endure the trial of affliction, and he leaves the chaff to be separated from the wheat.

The fifth sign is the multitude of false teachers, men who, either from an attachment to the law of Moses, or from the pride of false philosophy, corrupted the simplicity of the Gospel. This perversion appeared in the days of the apostles. Complaints of it, and warnings against it, are scattered through all their epistles. Neither the sword of the persecutor, nor the wit of the scorner has done so much injury to the cause of Christianity, as the strifes and idle disputes of those who bear his name. Many, in early times, were shaken by the errors of false prophets. Improper sentiments and passions were cherished; the union of Christians was broken, and the religion of love and peace became an occasion of discord. But these corruptions, however disgraceful to Christians, are a testimony both of the candour and the divine knowledge of the author of the Gospel; and even those who perverted his religion fulfilled his words.

We have now gone through those signs which announced the destruction of Jerusalem, and we are come to the circumstances, marked in the prophecy, which happened during the siege.

The first is, Jerusalem being compassed with armies, or, as Matthew expressed it, the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place. There were commonly engraved upon the Roman standards, after the times of the republic, the images of those emperors whom admiration or flattery had translated into the num-

ber of gods. The soldiers were accustomed to swear by these images, to worship them, and to account them the gods of battle. The Jews, educated in an abhorrence of idolatry, could not bear that images, before which men thus bowed, should be brought within the precincts of their city : and soon after the death of our Lord, they requested a Roman general, Vitellius, who was leading troops through Judea against an enemy of the emperor, to take another road, because, said they, it is not *πατριον ἡμιν* to behold from our city any images. With strict propriety, then, the dark expression of Daniel, which had not till that time been understood, is interpreted by our Lord as meaning the offensive images of a great multitude of standards brought within that space, a circumference of two miles round the city which was accounted holy, in order to render the city desolate ; and he mentions this as the signal to his followers to fly from the low parts of Judea to the mountains. It may appear to you too late to think of flying, after the Roman armies were seen from Jerusalem. But the manner in which the siege was conducted justified the wisdom of this advice. A few years before Titus destroyed Jerusalem, Cestius Gallus laid siege to it ; he might have taken the city if he had persevered ; but without any reason that was known, says Josephus, he suddenly led away his forces. And after his departure many fled from the city as from a sinking ship. Vespasian, too, was slow in his approaches to the city ; and by the distractions which at that time took place in the government of Rome, was frequently diverted from executing his purpose ; so that the Christians, to whom the first appearance of Cestius's army brought an

‘explanation of the words of Jesus, by following his directions, escaped entirely from the carnage of the Jews. Our Lord warns his disciples of the imminency of the danger, and urges them, by various expressions, to the greatest speed in their flight. The reason of this urgency is explained by Josephus. After Titus sat down before Jerusalem, he surrounded the city with a wall, which was finished in three days, so that none could escape; and factions were by that time become so violent, that none were allowed to surrender. The party called zealots, who in their zeal for the law of Moses, and in the hope of receiving deliverance from heaven, thought it their duty to resist the Romans to the last extremity, put to death all who attempted to desert, and thus assisted the enemy in enclosing an immense multitude within this devoted city. With what gracious foresight does the divine prophet guard his followers against this complication of evils, and repeat his warning in the most striking words, in order to convince all who paid regard to what he said, that their only safety lay in flight!

A second circumstance by which our Lord marks this siege, is the unparalleled distress that was then to be endured. “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of this world to this time; no, nor ever shall be.” It is a very strong expression, of itself sufficient to distinguish this prophecy from conjecture. And the expression, strong as it appears, is so strictly applicable to the subject, that we find almost the same words in Josephus, who certainly did not copy them from Jesus. “In my opinion,” he says, “all the calamities which ever were endured since the beginning of the world

were inferior to those which the Jews now suffered. Never was any city more wicked, and never did any city receive such punishment. Without was the Roman army, surrounding their walls, crucifying thousands before their eyes, and laying waste their country : within were the most violent contentions among the besieged, frequent bloody battles between different parties, rapine, fire, and the extremity of famine. Many of the Jews prayed for the success of the Romans, as the only method to deliver them from a more dreadful calamity, the atrocious violence of their civil dissensions."

A third circumstance mentioned by our Lord, is the shortening of the siege. Josephus computes that there fell, during the siege, by the hands of the Romans, and by their own faction, 1,100,000 Jews. Had the siege continued long, the whole nation would have perished. But the Lord shortened the days for the elect's sake : the elect, that is, in scripture language, the Christians, both those Jews within the city, whom this fulfilment of the words of Jesus was to convert to Christianity, and those Christians who, according to the directions of their Master, had fled out of the city at the approach of the Roman army, and were then living in the mountains. The manner in which the days were shortened is most striking. Vespasian committed the conduct of the siege to Titus, then a young man, impatient of resistance, jealous of the honour of the Roman army, and in haste to return from the conquest of an obscure province to the capital of the empire. He prosecuted the siege with vigour ; he invited the besieged to yield, by offering them peace ; and he tried to intimidate them, by using, contrary to his na-

ture, every species of cruelty against those who fell into his hands. But all his vigour, and all his arts, would have been in vain, had it not been for the madness of those within. They fought with one another; they burned, in their fury, magazines of provisions sufficient to last them for years; and they deserted with a foolish confidence strong holds, out of which no enemy could have dragged them. After they had thus delivered their city into his hands, Titus, when he was viewing it, said, "God has been upon our side. Neither the hands nor the machines of men could have been of any avail against those towers. But God has pulled the Jews out of them, that he might give them to us." It was impossible for Titus to restrain the soldiers, irritated by an obstinate resistance, from executing their fury against the besieged. But his native clemency spared the Jews in other places. He would not allow the senate of Antioch, that city in which the disciples were first called Christians, to expel the Jews; for where, said he, shall these people go, now that we have destroyed their city? Titus was the servant of God to execute his vengeance on Jerusalem. But when the measure of that vengeance was fulfilled, the compassion of this amiable prince was employed to restrain the wrath of man. "The Lord shortened the days."

A fourth circumstance is, the number of false Christs, men, of whom we read in Josephus, who, both during the siege and after it, kept up the spirits of the people, and rendered them obstinate in their resistance, by giving them hopes that the Messiah was at hand to deliver them out of all their calamities. The greater the distress was, the people

were the more disposed to catch at this hope ; and, therefore, it was necessary for our Lord to warn his disciples against being deluded by it.

The last circumstance is, the extent of this distress. Our Lord has employed a bold figure. But the boldest of his figures are always literally true : “ As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be : For wheresoever the carcase is, there shall the eagles be gathered together.” The Roman army, who were at this time the servants of the Son of man, entered on the east side of Judea, and carried their devastation westward ; so that, in this grand image, the very direction of the ruin, as well as the suddenness of it, is painted : and it extended to every place where Jews were to be found. A gold or silver eagle, borne on the top of a spear, belonged to every legion, and was always carried along with it. Wheresoever the carcase—the Jewish people who were judicially condemned by God—was, there were also those eagles. There was no part of Judea, says Josephus, which did not partake of the miseries of the capital ; and his history of the Jewish war ends with numbering the thousands who fell in other places of the world also by the Roman sword.

I have thus led you, as particularly as appears to me to be necessary, through the prophecy of our Lord respecting the signs, which announced the destruction of Jerusalem, and the circumstances which attended the siege ; and I wish now to fix your attention upon a particular prediction interwoven in this prophecy, concerning the progress of Christianity previous to that period, both because the subject renders it interesting, and because the place

which our Lord has given it in this prophecy, opens a most instructive and enlarged view of the economy of the divine dispensations.

6. The prediction is—"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end" of the Jewish state "come."

We find our Lord always speaking with confidence of the establishment of his religion in the world. It is a confidence which could not reasonably be inspired by any thing he beheld : multitudes following him out of curiosity, but easily offended, and at length demanding his crucifixion—a few unlearned, feeble men, affectionately attached indeed to his person, but with very imperfect apprehensions of his religion, and devoid of the most likely instruments of spreading even their own apprehensions through the world—a world which hated him while he lived, and which he knew was to hate his disciples after his death—a world, consisting of Jews, wedded to their own religion, and abhorring his doctrine as an impious attempt to supersede the law of Moses ; and of heathens, amongst whom the philosophers, full of their own wisdom, despised the simplicity of the gospel, and the vulgar, devoted to childish abominable superstitions, and averse from the spiritual worship of the gospel, were disposed to execute the vengeance of jealous malignant deities upon a body of men who refused to offer incense at their altars—a world, too, in which every kind of vice abounded—in which the passions of men demanded indulgence, and spurred at the restraint of the holy commandment of Jesus. Yet, in these circumstances, with such obstacles, our Lord, conscious of his divine character, and

knowing that the Spirit was given to him without measure, foretels, with perfect assurance, that his gospel shall be preached in all the world. Had he fixed no time, this prophecy, bold as it is, might have been regarded as one of the acts by which an impostor tries to raise the spirits of his followers; and we should have heard it said, that, instead of a mark of the spirit of prophecy, there was here only the sagacity of a man, who, aware of the wonderful revolutions in the opinions and manners of men, trusting that, in some succeeding age, after other systems had, in their turn, been exploded, his system might become fashionable, had ventured to say, that it should be preached in all the world, and left the age which should see this publication to convert an indefinite expression into an accomplished prophecy. But here is nothing indefinite—a pointed, precise declaration, which no impostor, who was anxious about the success of his system, would have hazarded, and concerning the truth of which, many of that generation amongst whom he lived remained long enough upon earth to be able to judge. The end, by the connection of the words with the context, means the conclusion of the age of the law; and it is still more clearly said, in the 13th chapter of Mark, in the middle of the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, “But the Gospel must first be published to all nations.” Now, the destruction of Jerusalem happened within forty years after the death of our Saviour, so that we are restricted to this space of time in speaking of the fulfilment of the prophecy. We learn from the book of Acts, that many thousands were converted soon after the day of Pentecost, and that devout Jews out of every nation under heaven

were witnesses of the miraculous effusion of the Holy Ghost. These men, all of whom were amazed, and some of whom were converted, by what they saw, could not fail to carry the report home, and thus prepared distant nations for receiving those who were better qualified, and more expressly commissioned, to preach the gospel. After the death of Stephen, there arose a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem, which by this time had multiplied exceedingly ; and they “ were scattered abroad through the regions of Judea and Samaria ; and they travelled as far as Phœnice, and Cyprus, and Antioch ; and the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed.”* The book of Acts is chiefly an account of the labours of the Apostle Paul ; and we see this one apostle, to adopt the words of a fellow-labourer of his, a preacher both in the East, and to the utmost boundaries of the West, planting churches in Asia and Greece, and travelling from Jerusalem to Illyricum, a tract which has been computed to be not less than 2000 miles. If such were the labours of one, what must have been accomplished by the journeyings of all the twelve, who, taking different districts, went forth to fulfil the last command of their master, by being his witnesses to the uttermost ends of the earth. The Apostle Paul says, in his epistle to the Romans, “ that their faith was spoken of throughout all the world ;” and to the Colossians, “ that the word which they had heard was by that time preached to every creature.” We know certainly that Paul preached the gospel in Rome : and such was the effect of his preaching, that,

* Acts viii. 1 ; xi. 19, 20.

seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem, Tacitus says there was an immense number of Christians in that city.* From the capital of the world the knowledge of Christianity was spread, like all the improvements in art and science over the world; that is, according to the common sense of the phrase, throughout the Roman empire. When the whole known world was governed by one prince, the communication was easy. In every part of the empire garrisons were stationed—roads were opened—messengers were often passing—and no country then discovered was too distant to hear the gospel of the kingdom. It is generally agreed, that within the forty years which I mentioned, Scythia on the north, India on the east, Gaul and Egypt on the west, and Æthiopia on the south, had received the doctrine of Christ: and we know that the island of Britain, which was then regarded as the extremity of the earth, the most remote and savage province, was frequently visited during that time by Roman emperors and their generals. It is even said that the gospel was preached publicly in London ten years before the destruction of Jerusalem. As far, then, as our information goes, whether we collect it from the book of Acts, from the occasional mention made by heathen historians of a subject upon which they bestowed little attention, or from the concurring testimony of the oldest Christian historians, the word of Christ was literally fulfilled; and you have, in the short space of time to which he limits the fulfilment of this word, a striking proof of his prophetic spirit.

* Tacit. Ann. lib. xv. 44.

But it is not enough to attend to the fulfilment of this prophecy. The place which it holds, and the manner in which it is expressed, suggest to us something further. The gospel, at whatsoever time it be published, is a witness to those who hear it, of the being, the providence, and the moral government of God. But, as it is said, "it shall be preached to all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come," we are led to consider that particular kind of witness which the preaching of the gospel, before the end of the Jewish state, afforded to all nations; and it is here, I said, that there opens to us a most instructive and enlarged view of the economy of the divine dispensations.

Had it not been for this early and universal preaching, the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus would have appeared to the world an event of the same order with the destruction of any other city. They might have talked of the obstinacy of the besieged—of the fury of the conquerors—of the unexampled distress which was endured; but it would not have appeared to them that there was in all this any thing divine, any other warning than is suggested by the ordinary fortune of war. But when the gospel was first published, it was a witness to all nations, that in the end of the Jewish state there was a fulfilment of the prophecy—a punishment of infidelity—and the termination of the law of Moses.

1. It was a witness of the fulfilment of prophecy. Wherever the first preachers of Christianity went, they carried the gospels along with them, as the authentic history of Him whom they preached. We have reason to think, that in many parts of the world the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and

Luke, were translated into the language of the country, or into the Latin, which was generally understood, before Jerusalem was destroyed. The early Christians, then, in the most distant parts of the world, had in their hands the prophecy before the event. The Roman armies, and the messengers of the empire, would soon transmit a general account of the siege. The history of Josephus, written and published by the order of Vespasian and Titus, would transmit the particulars to some at least of the most illustrious commanders in distant provinces ; and thus, while all who named the name of Christ would learn the fact, that Jerusalem was destroyed, they who were inquisitive might learn also the circumstances of the fact, and by comparing the narration which they received, with the prophecy of which they had been formerly in possession, would know assuredly that he who had uttered that prophecy was more than man. There are still great events to happen in the history of the Christian church, which we trust will bring to those who shall be permitted to see them a full conviction of the divine character of Jesus. But it was wisely ordered, that the earliest Christians should receive this prophecy long before it came to pass, that the faith of those who had not seen the Lord's Christ, might, at a time when education, authority, and example, were not on the side of that faith, be confirmed by the event ; and that all the singular circumstances of this siege might afford to the nations of the earth, in the beginnings of the gospel, a demonstration that Jesus spake the truth.

2. A witness of the punishment of infidelity. The

destruction of Jerusalem was foretold, not merely to give an example of the divine knowledge of him who uttered the prophecy, but because the Jews deserved that destruction. The crime which brought it upon them is intimated in many of our Lord's parables, and is declared clearly in other passages, so that those who were in possession of the prophecy could not mistake the cause. All the nations of the earth to whom the gospel was preached, knew that the Jews had killed the Lord Jesus with this horrid imprecation, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children;" that they had rejected all the evidences of the truth of Christianity which were exhibited in their own land, and not content with despising the gospel, had stirred up the minds of the heathen against the disciples of Jesus, and appeared, so long as their city existed, the most bitter enemies of the Christian name. The nations of the earth saw this obstinacy and barbarity recompensed in the very manner which the Author of the gospel foretold, and having his predictions in their hands, they beheld his enemies taken in the snare which he had announced. The mighty works which he did upon earth were miracles of mercy, by which he meant to win the hearts of mankind. But the execution of his threatenings against a nation of enemies was a miracle of judgment. And the unparalleled calamities which the Jews, according to his words, endured, were a warning from heaven to all that heard the gospel, not to reject the counsel of God against themselves.

3. A witness that, in the destruction of Jerusalem, there was the termination of the law of Moses. While many Jews persecuted the Christians, there

were others who attempted by reasoning, to impose upon them an observance of the law of Moses. They said that it was impious to forsake an institution confessedly of divine original, and that no subsequent revelation could diminish the sanctity of a temple built by God, or abolish the offerings which he had required to be presented there. You find this reasoning most ably combated in the Epistles of Paul, and particularly in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But the arguments of the apostle did not completely counterbalance the evil done by the Judaizing teachers, to the cause of Christ. Many were disturbed by the sophistry of these men in the exercise of their Christian liberty ; and many were deterred from embracing the gospel, by the fear of being brought under the yoke of the Jewish ceremonies. Some signal interposition of Providence was necessary to disjoin the spiritual universal religion of Jesus from the carnal local ordinances of the law of Moses, and to afford entire satisfaction to the minds of those who wished for that disjunction. The destruction of Jerusalem was that interposition ; and the general publication of the gospel before that event, led men both to look for it as the solution of their doubts, and to rest in it after it happened, as the declaration from heaven that the ceremonial law was finished. The service of the temple could not continue after one stone of the temple was not left upon another ; the tribes could no longer assemble at Jerusalem after the city was laid in ruins ; and that bondage, under which the Jewish nation wished to bring the Christians, ceased after the Jews were scattered over the face of the earth.

And thus we are enabled, by the place which this

prophecy holds, to mark a beautiful consistency, and a mutual dependency in the revelations with which God hath favoured the world,—the manifold wisdom of God conspicuous in the whole economy of religion. The Almighty committed to Abraham and his descendants the hope of the Messiah, and the law was a school-master to bring men to Christ. When he who was the end of the law appeared, he appealed to Moses and the prophets as testifying of him, and he claimed the character of that prophet whom they had announced. But the purpose of the law being fulfilled by his appearance, it was no longer necessary that the preparatory dispensation with its appurtenances should continue. He gave notice, therefore, of the conclusion of the age of the law, and as that age began and was conducted with visible symbols of divine power, so with like symbols it was finished. The declaration of these symbols, published to the world in the Gospels, prevented them from looking upon the event with the astonishment of ignorance, and taught them to connect this awful ending of the one age with the character of that age which then commenced. Having seen a period elapse sufficient for the faith of Christ to gain proselytes in many countries, they saw the temple of Jerusalem by an interposition which was the literal fulfilment of the words of Christ taken down, and were thus assured that the hour was indeed come at which ancient prophets had more obscurely hinted, and which Jesus had declared in express words as not very distant, when men were not to worship the Father at Jerusalem, but when the true worshippers, every one from his place, should worship God in

spirit and in truth. The effect of the event, thus interpreted by the prophecy, was powerful and instantaneous. It furnished the earliest Christian fathers with an unanswerable argument against the Judaizing teachers: it solved the doubts of those who were stumbled by their reasonings: it removed one great objection which the Gentiles had to the gospel: and when the wall of partition was thus removed, numbers were “turned from idols to serve the living God.”

7. I mentioned as the next subject of the predictions of Jesus, the condition of the Jewish nation subsequent to the destruction of their city.

You may mark first the immediate consequences of the siege. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven.” It seems to be plain that these expressions point to the consequences of the siege, for they are thus introduced, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days,” *i. e.* the distress endured during the siege; and as if on purpose to show us that the event pointed at was not very distant, it is said a few verses after, “This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” To perceive the propriety of using such expressions in this place, you will recollect that symbolical language of which we spoke formerly,—dictated by necessity in early times, when the conceptions and the words of men were few,—retained in after times partly from habit, and partly to render speech more significant,—universally used in eastern countries,—and abounding in the writings

of the prophets, who, speaking under the influence of inspiration, full of the events which foretold, and elevated above the ordinary tone of their minds, employ a richness and pomp of imagery which exalts our conceptions of the importance of what they say, but at the same time increases the obscurity natural to prophecies, and made the people whom they addressed often call their discourses dark sayings. This eastern imagery, which pervades the prophetic style, is especially remarkable when the rise or fall of kingdoms is foretold. The images are then borrowed from the most splendid objects; and as in the ancient mode of writing by hieroglyphics, the sun, the moon, and stars, being bodies raised above the earth, were used to represent kingdoms and princes, so in the prophecies of their calamities, or prosperity, changes upon the heavenly bodies, bright light, and thick darkness came to be a common phraseology. Of the punishment which God was to inflict on Judea, he says by Jeremiah, “ I will stretch out my hand against thee and destroy thee; she hath given up the ghost; her sun is gone down, while it is yet day.”* Of Egypt, by Ezekiel, “ All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee, and make darkness over thy land, saith the Lord God.”† So by Joel, “ The earth shall quake before them, the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining; and the Lord shall utter his voice before his army.”‡ And when God promises deliverance and victory to his people, it is in these beauti-

* Jer. xv. 6, 9.

† Ezek. xxxii. 8.

‡ Joel ii. 10, 11.

ful words, “Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself. But the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold.”* It was most natural for the Messiah of the Jews to introduce this uniform language of former prophets in foretelling the dissolution of their state; and all that he says was fulfilled, according to the appropriated use of that language, immediately after the siege. For the city was desolated; the temple was burnt; that ecclesiastical constitution which the Romans had tolerated after Judea became a province of the empire was dissolved; the Sanhedrim no longer assembled; the office of the High Priest could no more be exercised according to the commandment of God; every privilege which had distinguished the people of the Jews ceased; the sceptre, in appearance as well as in reality, departed from Judah, and the very forms of the dispensation given by Moses came to an end.

As changes upon the kingdoms of the earth are produced by the all-ruling providence of God, so the ancient prophets often represent him in their figurative language, as coming in the clouds of heaven to execute vengeance upon a guilty nation; and Daniel applies this language† to the exertion of the power of the Son of Man, when he was to take away the dominion of the four beasts whom Daniel had seen in his vision, and to give the kingdom to the saints of the Most High. You find our Lord referring to this expression, which was familiar to every Jew. Immediately after the distress of the siege, you shall see the sign of the Son of man in

* Isaiah lx. 20; xxx. 26.

† Dan. vii. 13, 14, 27.

heaven. The sign which you have been taught to look for, is not a comet, or meteor, a wonderful appearance in the air to astonish the ignorant: it is the Son of man employing the Roman armies as his servants, to execute vengeance upon those who crucified him, and demonstrating to the world, by the complete dissolution of the Jewish state, that all power is committed to him.

The first part, then, of our Lord's prophecy concerning the condition of the Jewish people, subsequent to the siege, although expressed in sublime and figurative language, may be understood, by the analogy of the prophetic style, to mean, that the political and ecclesiastical constitution of Judea was to be annihilated immediately after that event.

But you may observe in Luke another prophecy concerning their condition, reaching to a remote period, and marking events, in their nature, most contingent. "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."* Not only shall the city be taken, and the constitution be dissolved, and many Jews fall by the edge of the sword, and many be led captive into all nations; but Jerusalem shall belong to the Gentiles, and be used by them in a contemptuous manner till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. As this prediction, when taken in connexion with other passages of Scripture, means a great deal more than is obvious at first sight, and as the present state of the Jews is one of the strongest visible arguments for the truth of Christianity, I shall lay before you the history of Jerusalem since it was taken, the con-

* Luke xxi. 24.

dition of the Jewish people during the desolation of their city, and that prospect of a better time which is intimated in the concise expression of our Lord.

The history of Jerusalem from the time of its being destroyed by Titus till this day, is a literal fulfilment of the expression, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles." The emperor Adrian conceived the design of rebuilding Jerusalem about forty-seven years after its destruction. He planted a Roman colony there, and in place of the temple of the God of the Jews, he erected a temple to Jupiter. The Jews, who inhabited the other parts of Judea, inflamed by this insulting act of sacrilege, engaged in open rebellion against the Romans, and, assembling in vast multitudes, got possession of their city, and kept it for a short time. But Adrian soon expelled them, demolished their towns and castles, desolated the land of Judea, and scattered those who survived over the face of the earth. He re-established the Roman colony in Jerusalem, gave it a new name, and forbade any Jew to enter it. Three hundred years after the death of our Saviour, Constantine, the first Roman emperor who embraced Christianity, built many splendid Christian churches in this Roman colony, and dispersed the Jews who attempted to disturb the Christians in their worship. Within thirty years after the death of Constantine, the Emperor Julian, who is known by the name of the Apostate, because, although he had been bred a Christian, he became a heathen, out of hatred to the Christians, and with a view to defeat the prophecy, invited the body of the Jewish people scattered through the empire, to return to their city; and professing to lament the oppression which they

had endured, gave orders for rebuilding their temple. His lieutenants did begin. But, says the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, whose respectable authority there is no reason in this instance to question, balls of fire bursting forth near the foundation made it impossible for the workmen to approach the place, and the enterprise was laid aside.* Julian did not reign above two years; and as all the emperors who succeeded him were Christians, no attempt was ever made to rebuild the temple, and the Jews were prohibited from living in the city. It was only by stealth, or by bribing the guards, that they obtained a sight of the ruins of their temple. In the year 637, Jerusalem was taken by the successors of the great impostor Mahomet. A mosque was built upon the very spot where the temple of Solomon had stood; and this mosque was afterwards so much enlarged and beautified, that it became the resort of the Mahometans in the adjoining countries, in the same manner as the temple had been of the Jews. Since that time, it has passed, in the succession of conquests made by different nations and tribes, through the hands of the Turks, the Egyptians, and the Mamelukes. It was for some time in possession of Christians, who, having marched from Europe at the era of the Crusades, to deliver their brethren in the holy land from oppression, and to rescue the sepulchre of our Lord out of the hands of Mahometans, took Jerusalem, and established a kingdom which lasted about a century. The Christian forces were at length expelled; the Mamelukes, and after them

* Amm. Marcel. lib. xxiii.

the Ottoman Turks regained the city, and till this day the Mahometan worship is established there. Christians who are drawn thither by reverence for the place where our Lord lay, are admitted to reside; and their worship is tolerated upon their paying a large tribute. But hardly any Jews are to be seen in the city. They consider it as so much defiled by the Mahometans and Christians, that they choose rather to worship God in any other place; they are persecuted by the reigning power. And the poverty of the city does not afford them much temptation in the way of gain to counterbalance the inconveniences to which they would be obliged to submit if they attempted to live there. Jerusalem then, is still trodden down of the Gentiles. During the seventeen hundred years that have elapsed since it was destroyed by Titus, the Jews have never been quietly settled there. It has, with hardly any interruption, belonged to Gentile nations; and it has recieved every thing which the Jews account a pollution.

You will attend next to the condition of the Jewish people during this desolation of their city. Amongst the many striking circumstances in the history of the ancient Jews, every intelligent observer will reckon the frequent dispersions of that unhappy people. Most other nations, when subdued by a warlike or powerful neighbour, have continued to inhabit some portion of their ancient territory. They have either adopted the laws and manners of their conquerors, and in process of time have been so completely incorporated with them, as not to form a distinct body, or if the cruel policy of the conquerors marked out for them a humbler station, they have descended from their former rank of free-

men, without changing their climate, and have remained as servants in the land of which they were once the masters. But the conquerors of Judea in all ages, not content with the subjection of the inhabitants, transplanted them into other countries, and in distant lands marked out the cities which they were to possess, and the fields which they were to cultivate. Thus Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, took away the ten tribes of Israel, and planted them beyond the river Euphrates, in the cities of the Medes. Nebuchadnezzar, 130 years after, carried the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin captive to Babylon; and the Romans also at a later period led the Jews captive into all nations. Whatever were the motives which led the enemies of the Jews to adopt this singular system of policy, in following it out, they only fulfilled the appointment of heaven: and the kings of Assyria and Babylon, and the emperors of Rome, although they meant it not so in their hearts, yet by the peculiar sufferings which they brought upon the captive nation, were the instruments of accomplishing the prophecies contained in its sacred books. Moses, amongst other curses which were to overtake the children of Israel in case of disobedience, mentions this: "I will make thy cities waste, and I will bring the land into desolation; and thine enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. The Lord shall bring against thee a nation from far, and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down. And ye shall be plucked off the land whither thou goest to possess it; and the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other."* The frequent captivities

* Levit. xxvi. 31, 32; Deut. xxviii. *passim*.

and dispersions of the Jews corresponded exactly to the words of the curse; and this singular punishment has been repeated as often as the sins of the nation called for the judgments of heaven.

It might have been expected that, by these frequent dispersions, the whole race of the Jews would be confounded amongst other nations. But it is most remarkable, that although distinguished from all other people by being scattered over the face of the earth, they remain distinguished also by their religion and customs; and although every where found, they are every where separated from those around them. I speak not of the ten tribes carried away by Esarhaddon, who were so far estranged from the true God before they left their own land, that they easily adopted the idolatry of the nations to which they were led captive, and so ceased to be a people.* But I speak of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, composing what was properly called the kingdom of Judah, which adhered to the family of David after Israel had rebelled against them, to which the promise of the Messiah had been restricted by the patriarch Jacob, and in which the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the fortunes of the Jewish nation is to be looked for. Now we know that when Judah was carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon, the captives did not worship the gods of the conquerors. Daniel and other great men were raised up by God to preserve the spirit of piety, and the fortitude of the servants of heaven. And by a concurrence of circumstances which the providence of God combined to fulfil his pleasure, those who were for the God of Israel re-

* Buchanan's Christian Researches.

ceived an invitation to return to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the temple. The edict of Cyrus king of Persia contained these words : * “ The Lord of heaven hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem. Who is there among you of all his people ? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel.” It was under the character of the servants of God, by which character they were distinguished from their idolatrous neighbours, that the Jews returned ; and the calamities which they had endured during their captivity, seem to have cured that proneness to idolatry, which the more ancient prophets so often reprove. All that returned are spoken of in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as zealous for the worship of the true God. Their descendants, who settled and multiplied in the Holy Land, never showed any inclination to worship idols. They endured a severe persecution under Antiochus, because they would not submit to the worship which he prescribed ; and one of the causes which incensed the Romans against them, was their abhorrence of the gods of the empire. Since their dispersion by Titus and by Adrian, they have never joined in Heathen, Christian, or Mahometan worship. Their rites, burdensome as they are, and contemptible as they appear in the eyes of strangers, have been religiously observed by the whole nation. A sullen, uncomplying, covetous spirit, has conspired with the singularity of their rites to render them odious and ridiculous. The character of a Jew is marked in every corner of the earth ; and one can find no words

* Ezra i. 2, 3.

which so literally express the condition of this people, as the words uttered more than 3000 years ago by their own lawgiver. “These curses shall come upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever; and thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all the nations whither the Lord shall lead thee.”* In this wonderful manner have the Jews, whose native land is still trodden down of the Gentiles, been preserved in all parts of the earth a distinct people.

But the prediction brings into our view the prospect of a better time: “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled;” which, in plain grammatical construction, implies, that when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden down. Our Lord is referring to the latter part of Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks: “The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood; and—he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate;” or, as I am assured by the best authority, it may be rendered, “upon the desolator.”† Now, this consummation, what the Septuagint calls ἡ συντελεια του καιρου, is to be learned from other parts of the book of Daniel, in which there is a most circumstantial prophecy of the fate of the great empires of the world, and, amongst the rest, of the empire of the Romans, who were the desolators of Judea.‡ A great part of that prophecy has been fulfilled. Learn-

* Deut. xxviii. 37, 46.

† Dan. ix. 26, 27.

‡ Dan. ii. and vii.

ed men have traced so striking a coincidence between the words of Daniel and the history of the world, as is sufficient to impress every candid mind with the divine inspiration of this prophet, highly favoured of the Lord, and to beget a full conviction, that every word which he has spoken will in due time be accomplished. When that will be, or how it will be, we know not. But as the events that have already happened have reflected the clearest light upon former parts of the prophecy, we may rest assured that the end, when it arrives, will explain those parts which are still dark, and that there are methods in reserve, by which the times of the Gentiles, that which is determined upon the desolator, all the purposes of God's providence respecting the kingdoms which have arisen out of the Roman empire, shall be fulfilled. It is perfectly agreeable to our Lord's words, to consider the return of the Jews to their own land as connected with this end, the fulfilment of the times of the Gentiles; and when we take into our view other parts of scripture, hardly any doubt is left in our minds that this was his meaning. Moses, when he threatens the Jews with dispersion, gives notice, that if, in their captivity, they returned to the Lord, he would gather them from the nations to which he had scattered them: "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God."* You find this hope expressed by David, by Solomon, by Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Accordingly the two tribes who re-

* Levit. xxvi. 44.

membered the God of their fathers, in fulfilment of this promise, as Nehemiah interprets their deliverance, were gathered from their captivity. After their return, the same threatenings of dispersion were denounced against them if they disobeyed, and the same promises of being brought back if they repented. Zechariah, who prophesied after the return, says, "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem, and the city shall be taken." But he says also, the day is coming when "I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication." * And this is agreeable to the words of more ancient prophets; for God says by Jeremiah, "Though I make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee;" † and by Amos, "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled out of the land which I have given them." ‡ These prophecies, and many others of the same import, open to our view a time when the Jews are to be brought back from captivity. Their return from Babylon, which was a fulfilment of their own prophecies, is a pledge that the greater promise of an everlasting settlement in their own land shall be fulfilled also. Their being to this day a distinct people, separate from all others, renders the fulfilment of the prophecy possible, and seems intended as a standing miracle to keep alive in the world the faith of this event. Our Lord, at the very time when he

* Zech. xiv. 2; xii. 9, 10.

† Jer. xxx. 11.

‡ Amos. ix. 15.

foretells the destruction of the holy city, and the second long captivity of the Jews, intimates, by his mode of expression, that it was not to be perpetual : and his apostle Paul, to whom Jesus, after his ascension, revealed the whole counsel of God, delights to dwell upon this thought—" I would not, brethren," he says to the Romans, " that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, that blindness in part has happened to Israel, till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in ; and so all Israel shall be saved." *

What a glorious view is here presented of the universal kingdom of the Messiah, which is at length to comprehend even the children of those who slew him ! What a consistency and grandeur in the conduct of divine Providence with regard to the Jews, that people whom God formed for himself to show forth his praise ! Raised up at first as a light in a dark place—retaining the knowledge and worship of the true God amidst the idolatry of the nations—keeping in their oracles the hope of the Saviour of mankind—carrying by their dispersions these oracles, this knowledge and hope, through the whole earth, and thus rendering the Messiah the desire of all nations—exhibiting in their singular misfortunes the holiness and the power of their God—a monument to the world in their present state, that Jesus is able to take vengeance of his enemies—and yet preserved, even in the midst of that punishment which they endure for obstinacy and infidelity, to receive Christ as a nation, and thus to be the future instruments of the conversion of the whole world ! When this people, by the out-stretched arm of the

* Rom. xi. 23.

Almighty, shall be brought back in his time from the lands where they now sojourn, to that land which, in the beginning, he chose for them, and Jerusalem, which is now trodden down of the Gentiles, shall be delivered to the Jews; when every prophecy in their books shall be found to conspire most exactly with the words spoken by Christ and his apostles, and all shall receive a striking accomplishment in events most interesting to the whole universe—what eye will be so sealed as to exclude this light, what mind so hardened as not to yield to a conviction which the infinite knowledge and power of God will then appear to have united in producing! Every charge of partiality in the Lord of nature, which the superficial infidel is hasty to bring forward, shall then be swallowed up in the full exposition of that great scheme which is now carrying forward for the final salvation of all the children of God, and every tongue will join in that expression of exalted devotion with which the Apostle Paul shuts up this subject—“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?” *

8. I mentioned, as the last subject of our Lord's prophecies, the final discrimination of the righteous and the wicked at the day of judgment. This great event is foretold under similitudes, in plain words, without hesitation, with solemnity, with minuteness. The veil is in some measure removed, and we, whose views are generally confined to the events of the

* Rom. xi. 33, 34.

little spot which we inhabit, are enabled by the great Prophet to look forward to the end of the world. He has, indeed, hidden the time from our eyes, but he has minutely described every other circumstance. The clearness of his predictions upon such a subject distinguishes him from every other teacher who had appeared before his time, and affords a presumption of his divine character. But this is not the place for enlarging upon these predictions, and I mention them at present, only to state the connection between them and the prophecy which we have been considering. The darkening of the sun, and moon, and stars—the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven—his sending forth his angels with a trumpet, and gathering his elect from the four winds; all these circumstances bring to our minds a day more awful and important than the destruction of Jerusalem, or any of its immediate consequences. And although it is possible, and agreeable to the analogy of Scripture language, to find a meaning for the various expressions here used, in the dissolution of the Jewish state, in the general publication of the gospel after that event, and the great accession of converts which it contributed to bring to Christianity—yet we know that these are the very expressions by which our Lord and his apostles have described that day, when all who have lived upon the face of the earth shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Several commentators have been of opinion that there is here, in addition to the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, a direct prophecy of the day of judgment. But the limitation of the time of the fulfilment to the existence of the generation then alive, is an unanswerable objection

to this opinion ; and, therefore, I consider the latter part of this prediction as a specimen given by our Lord of a prophecy with a double sense. We found that, in the Old Testament, the language of the prophet is often so contrived as to apply at once to two events, the one near and local, the other remote and universal. Thus David, in describing his own sufferings, introduces expressions which are a literal description of the sufferings of the Messiah, and are applied as such by the Evangelists ; and the words in which he paints the peaceful reign of Solomon, received a literal accomplishment in the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. So here the Messiah, who often, in other respects, copies the manner, and refers to the words of ancient prophets, while he is immediately foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem, looks forward to the day of judgment, and expresses himself in a language which, although, by the established practice of the prophets, it is applicable in a figurative sense to the fall of a city and the dissolution of a state, yet in its true, literal, precise meaning, applies to that day in which all cities and states are equally interested. While the fulfilment then of the direct sense of this prophecy is a standing proof of the divine knowledge of Jesus, it is also a pledge, that the secondary sense shall in due time be accomplished ; and thus the exhortation with which our Lord concludes this prophecy, and which is manifestly expressed in such a manner, as shows that it was intended for his disciples in every age, is enforced upon us as well as upon those that heard him. The Christians were delivered from the destruction in which their countrymen were involved, by following the directions of Jesus ; and upon our

watchfulness and obedience to him depend our comfort, our improvement, and the salvation of our souls, in the great day of the Lord.

Josephus, Hurd, and Commentaries on the 24th chapter of Matthew, in the works of Tillotson, Jortin, Newton, Newcome, &c.

CHAP. VIII.

RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

MANY of the principal facts in the Christian religion may be introduced as instances of the fulfilment of the prophecies of Jesus, and as thus serving to illustrate the abundant measure in which the spirit of prophecy was given to that Great Prophet who had been announced from the beginning of the world. But two of these facts deserve a more particular consideration in a view of the evidences of Christianity, because, independently of their having been foretold, they bring a very strong confirmation to the high claim advanced in the Scriptures. The two facts which I mean are, the resurrection of Jesus, and the propagation of Christianity.

The first of these facts is the resurrection of Jesus. Had he never returned from the grave, his enemies would have considered his death as the completion of their triumph : and those who had admired his character, and had been convinced by his works that he was a teacher sent from God, must have considered his blood as only adding to the sum of all the righteous blood that had been shed upon the earth. His friends might have made a feeble attempt to transmit, with distinguished honour to pos-

terity, the name of Jesus of Nazareth as a prophet mighty in word and in deed. Yet even they would have been stumbled when they recollected his pretensions and his prophecies. He had claimed a character and an authority very inconsistent with the notion of his being a victim to the malice of men; and he had foretold that after being three days, that is, according to the Jewish phraseology, a part of three days in the grave, he would rise from the dead on the third day: resting the truth of his claim upon this fact as the sign that was to be given. The resurrection of Jesus, then, is not merely an important, it is an essential fact in the history of Christianity. If the Author of this religion did not return from the grave, he is, according to his own confession, an impostor: if he did, all who are satisfied with the evidence of this singular fact, must acknowledge, from the nature of the case, that he was the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead.

It behoves you to examine with particular care the kind of evidence upon which the wisdom of God has chosen to rest a fact so essential. To the apostles, who were with Jesus when he was apprehended, who knew certainly that he was crucified, one of whom saw him on the cross, and all of whom were permitted to converse with him after he was risen, his resurrection was as much an object of sense, at least it was an inference as clearly deducible from what they did see, as if they had been present when the angel rolled the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and when Jesus came forth in the same manner as Lazarus had done a little before at his command. But this evidence of sense could not extend beyond the

forty days during which Jesus remained upon earth. And the first thing that meets you, in an inquiry into the truth of the resurrection, is the number of persons to whom this evidence of sense was vouchsafed. The time is limited. But there is no necessary limitation of the number that might have seen Jesus during that time, and, as the faith of future ages must in a great measure rest upon their testimony, it is natural to consider whether there be any thing in the particular number to whom this evidence of sense was confined, that serves to render the fact incredible.

The number is much greater than will appear at first sight to a careless reader of the Gospels. The soldiers, the women, and the disciples only are mentioned there. But you will find it said, that Jesus went before his disciples into Galilee, where he had appointed them to meet him; and one of the appearances narrated by John is said to have been at the sea of Tiberias, which lay in Galilee. Now Galilee was the country where our Lord had spent the greatest part of his life, where his person was perfectly well known, where his mother's relations and the families of the apostles resided. His going to Galilee therefore, after his resurrection, was giving to a number of persons deeply interested in the fact, an opportunity of being convinced by their own senses that the Lord was risen indeed, and thus crowned those evidences of his divine mission which they had derived from their former acquaintance with him. Accordingly, Paul says, that our Lord "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once," which must have happened in Galilee, for the number of disciples in Jerusalem after the ascension was

but “an hundred and twenty.” The testimony of this multitude of witnesses in Galilee was sufficient to diffuse through their neighbours and contemporaries a conviction of the fact which they saw.

But, it has been asked, Why did Jesus retire to a remote province, and show himself at Jerusalem only to a few witnesses? Why did he not appear openly in the temple, in the synagogue, in the streets of the holy city, as he was accustomed to do before his death, and overpower the incredulity of the Jews by an ocular demonstration of his divine power? It is admitted that he did not show himself to all the people. But the objection arising from this supposed deficiency in the evidence, has been completely answered by some of the best commentators upon the New Testament, and by writers in the deistical controversy. The heads of the answers are these. The Jewish nation, who had resisted all the evidences of our Lord’s divine mission which were exhibited before their eyes during his ministry, were not entitled to expect that any further means should be employed by heaven for their conviction. The probability is, that the same narrow views and evil passions which had produced their unbelief while he lived, would have rendered his appearance in their city after his death ineffectual. Our Lord, who foresaw this inefficacy, seems to suggest it as the reason of his conduct in this matter, when he concludes one of his parables with saying, “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” After our Lord spake these words, the experiment was made in the case of Lazarus. Many of the neighbours of Mary might know certainly that her brother had been

raised by the power of Jesus. Yet some of them who had seen all the things that were done, went and told the Pharisees; and the Pharisees, upon the report of this miracle, took counsel to put Jesus to death. It was not meet that his own resurrection should give occasion to similar plots again to take away his life. To all this it is to be added in the last place, that, whatever reception Jesus had met with in Jerusalem, the evidence for Christianity might have been injured by his appearing there after his resurrection. Had the Jews continued to reject and persecute him, the united testimony of the nation against the resurrection might have been represented as sufficient to outweigh the positive testimony of the apostles. Had they received him as their Messiah after he was risen, the Christian religion might have been represented as a state-trick devised by able men for the glory of the nation, which met with opposition at first, but to the faith of which, a well-concerted story of the death and resurrection of its author did at last subdue the minds of the people. From this specimen of the answers which may be made to the objection, it appears that God tries the honesty of our hearts by the methods which he employs to enlighten our reason, that the evidence of religion was not intended to overpower those whose minds are perverted, but to satisfy those who love the truth, and that, in examining any branch of that evidence, our business is not to inquire what God might have done, but to consider what he has done, and to rest on those facts which appear to our understanding to be sufficiently proven, although our imagination may figure other proofs by which they are not supported.

Having seen that the objection suggested by the

limitation of the number of those who saw Jesus after his resurrection, may easily be answered, I proceed to state the different kinds of evidence which we, in these later ages, have for the truth of this fact. They are three. The traditionary evidence arising from the universal diffusion of the belief of this fact through the Christian world—the clear testimony of the apostles recorded in their writings—and the extraordinary powers conferred upon the apostles.

The lowest degree of evidence which we enjoy for the resurrection of Jesus, is that kind of traditionary evidence which arises from the universal diffusion of the belief of this fact through the Christian world. It appears from the earliest Christian writers, that it was the general faith of all who named the name of Christ, that he had risen from the dead. We are told that the first Christians, in that exultation of mind of which our familiarity with the great truths of religion makes it difficult for us to form a just conception, were accustomed to salute one another when they met with this expression, *Χριστός αναστη*: and the first day of the week, which, from the beginning of the Christian church was called *Κυριακή ήμερα*, and in all parts of the Christian world has been observed as the day upon which the followers of Jesus assemble for the exercises of devotion, is a standing unequivocal memorial of the truth of the fact which upon that day especially is remembered. It is impossible to conceive how so extraordinary a fact should have been so universally propagated, if it had not been founded in the certain uncontradicted knowledge of those who lived near the time. But, strong as this presumption may justly be held, the

faith of future ages in so essential a fact required a more determinate support. And this is found in

The clear precise testimony of the apostles, those witnesses chosen before of God, who did eat and drink with Jesus after he rose from the dead ; a testimony transmitted to us in the authentic genuine record of discourses that were delivered before his murderers in the city where he suffered, six weeks after he rose ; and of other discourses, and histories, and epistles, in which eye-witnesses declare what they had seen, and heard, and handled of the word of life. To this office Jesus separated the apostles, when he called them, as soon as he began to teach, to be always with him ; and when he said to them a little before his death, “ Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning ;” and a little before his ascension, “ Ye shall be witnesses unto me to the uttermost parts of the earth.” The apostles had this apprehension of the nature of their office ; for when the place of Judas was to be supplied, Peter says to the disciples, “ Of these men that have companied with us, all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” And to Paul, who was an apostle “ born out of due time,” Jesus appeared from heaven, that he might also be a witness of the things which he had seen.

You may mark here an uniformity in the evidence of Christianity. The same persons, who are to us the witnesses of the signs which Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, are witnesses also of his having risen from the dead. In both cases they do not declare opinions upon doubtful points, but

they attest palpable facts, level to the apprehension of the plainest understanding: and their clear unambiguous testimony to the miracles and the resurrection of Jesus, in which they agreed with themselves and with one another till the end, is written in the same books, that we may believe that he is the Christ, the son of God.

We are thus led back to those circumstances which were formerly stated as giving credibility in our days to the miracles of Jesus; such as the character of the apostles, the scene of danger and suffering in which their testimony was given, the fortitude with which they adhered to it, and that simplicity, that air of truth, which pervades the evangelical history, and which falsehood cannot uniformly preserve. All these circumstances are common to the record of the miracles and to the record of the resurrection. But there are some internal marks of truth in the history of the resurrection, which are peculiarly fitted to impress conviction upon all who are capable of apprehending them. I shall mention the three following. The history of the resurrection, published during the life of the witnesses of that event, relates the consternation which it excited amongst the enemies of Jesus, the awkward attempts which they made to affix the charge of imposture upon the disciples, and the currency of that report among the Jews at the time of the publication of the history. Again, the historians exhibit the prejudices of the apostles, their slowness of heart to believe, the natural manner in which their doubts were overcome, and the combination of circumstances by which a firm belief of the resurrection was established in the minds of the witnesses, and a

foundation was laid for the faith of succeeding ages. There are, lastly, that apparent imperfection and inaccuracy in the several accounts of this transaction, and those seeming contradictions, which render it impossible for any person to believe that there was a collusion amongst the evangelists in framing their story, and which yet are of such a kind, that the ingenuity of learned men, by attending to minute and delicate circumstances which escape ordinary observers, has formed out of the four narrations a consistent, probable account of the whole transaction. It is not possible for me to enlarge upon these points. But they are so essential to this most interesting article of our faith, that they deserve your closest study. And for that purpose I recommend to you the four following books, which every student of divinity ought to read. The first is Ditton on the Resurrection. One part of this book is a general view of the nature of moral evidence, and of the obligation which lies upon every reasonable being to assent to certain degrees of moral evidence; the other part is an application of this general view to the testimony upon which the resurrection of Christ is received; and is calculated to show that this testimony has all the qualifications of an evidence obligatory to the human understanding. The second book is known by the name of the Trial of the Witnesses. There are a judge, a jury, and pleaders upon both sides of the question. The arguments are summed up by the judge, and the jury are unanimous in their verdict that the apostles were not guilty of bearing false witness in their testimony of the resurrection. The form of the book, as well as the excellence of the matter,

has rendered it popular ; and it will be particularly useful to you by making you acquainted with the objections and the heads of the answers. The third is, Gilbert West's *Observations upon the History of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, which you will find both as a separate book, and also inserted in *Watson's Tracts*. This masterly writer lays together the several narrations, so as to form a consistent account of the whole transaction. He gives a very full view, first, of the order and the matter of that evidence which was laid before the apostles, and then of the arguments which induce us, in this remote age, to receive that evidence. His book, according to this plan, not only places in the strongest light those internal marks of credibility by which the history of the resurrection is distinguished, but also embraces most of the arguments for the truth of Christianity. The fourth is *Cook's Illustration of the General Evidence of the Resurrection of Christ*, a work which displays much acuteness, and a degree of novelty in the manner of stating that evidence. Even Dr. Priestley, an author whom I frequently mention in the following parts of my course, but whose name I seldom have occasion to quote in support of any doctrine of the Christian religion, and whose creed Mr. Gibbon has well called a scanty one, has said in one of his latest publications, " The resurrection of our Saviour, being the most extraordinary of all events, the evidence of it is remarkably circumstantial, in consequence of which, there is not perhaps any fact in all ancient history so perfectly credible, according to the most established rules of evidence, as it is." *

* *Hist. of Early Opinions*, iv. 19.

Besides the universal tradition in the Christian church, and the written testimony of the apostles, there is yet a third ground upon which we believe the resurrection of Christ.

“ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater ;” and that witness was given in the extraordinary powers which were conferred upon the apostles before they began to execute their commission, and which continued with them always. I stated these powers formerly as the fulfilment of prophecy. But they present themselves at this place as the vouchers of the testimony of the apostles ; and in this light they are uniformly stated both by our Lord and by the witnesses themselves. He said to them before his death, “ But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me ;” and “ he will convince the world of sin, because they believe not on me.” * Again, a little before his ascension, he said, “ Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses to me.” † Peter, in one of his first sermons, speaking of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, says, “ We are his witnesses of these things ; and so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him.” ‡ The word translated comforter, in the first passage that I quoted, is *παράκλητος*, which exactly corresponds in etymology to the Latin word *advocatus*, from which comes our word advocate, a person called in to stand by another in a court of justice, to assist him in pleading his cause, and confuting his adversaries. The apostles spake before kings

* John xv. 26 ; xvi. 8, 9.

† Acts i. 8.

‡ Acts v. 32.

and governors, before the whole world, bearing witness to the resurrection of Christ. But lest they should be confounded by the subtlety, or overwhelmed by the power of their enemies, here is a divine person promised to confirm what they said, and to join with them in convincing the world of their sin in rejecting Jesus, and of his righteousness, that although he had been condemned as a malefactor, he was accounted righteous in the sight of God. His own works were the evidence, to which he always appealed in his lifetime, that God was with him ; and when he left the earth, the works which he enabled his servants to perform, the same in kind with his own, were the evidence that he had returned to his Father. " Therefore," says Peter on the day of Pentecost, " being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." *

Here is another instance of that uniformity which we have often occasion to mark in the evidence of Christianity ; the same divine attestation of the servants of Jesus as of himself ; the same proof of his resurrection from the dead, as of the high claim which he advanced when he was alive. " The works which I do," he said, " bear witness that the Father hath sent me ; and the works which I do, shall ye my apostles do also, because I go to my Father." We are thus led back to the amount of the argument from miracles, in order to perceive the nature of that confirmation which this testimony of the Spirit gives to the testimony of the apostles.

* Acts ii. 33.

If there be an almighty Ruler of the universe, who has established what we call the laws of nature, and who can suspend them at his pleasure; and if this almighty Ruler be a God of truth, who takes an interest in the happiness of his reasonable offspring, it is impossible that the apostles of Jesus could be invested with powers, the exertion of which was fitted to convince every candid observer of the truth of an imposture; and, therefore, since signs and wonders, far beyond the measure of human power are ascribed to the apostles in authentic histories published at the time, in epistles addressed by themselves to the witnesses of those signs, and in the writings of authors nearly contemporary; since no attempt was made to disprove the facts at the time when the imposture might have been easily exposed, and since the signs were expressly wrought in confirmation of this assertion of the apostles, that their Master was risen from the dead, we are constrained by the strongest moral evidence to believe that that assertion was true.

It is impossible for words to make this argument plainer. But there are some particulars which may illustrate the economy of the divine dispensation in conferring these extraordinary powers, and the connection which they have with the other branches of the evidence for Christianity.

The day upon which our Lord rose was the day after that Sabbath which was the passover, *i. e.* it was the first day of the week, the Jewish Sabbath being the seventh; and it was called in the Levitical law, the wave-offering. Pentecost was the *πεντηκοστή ἡμέρα*, the 50th day from the wave-offering. It was therefore also the first day of the week, and

it was a day upon which all the males of Judea were supposed to be present before the Lord in Jerusalem. Our Lord remained forty days upon earth after his resurrection, and he probably spent the greatest part of that time in Galilee. But he was in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem upon the fortieth day, for he ascended from Mount Olivet.* The apostles, who probably would feel it to be their duty as Jews to be present at the approaching festival, were commanded by their master not to depart from Jerusalem till they received the promise of the Father : for, said he, “ Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

Accordingly the eleven returned from the mount, where they had witnessed the ascension, to Jerusalem, and continued quietly with the disciples in prayer and supplication. We have reason to think that they did not appear in public ; and we do not read of any other transaction but filling up the Apostolical College, till the day of Pentecost, the 10th day after the ascension, when, being “ all with one accord in one place, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” The gift of tongues was the first that was exercised, because it was suited to the occasion. Devout Jews and proselytes were assembled, from respect to the festival, out of all countries. To every one in his own tongue, the apostles, inspired with fortitude, another gift of the Spirit, spoke the wonderful works of God. And Peter explained the appearance which excited their wonder, to be the attestation which, in fulfilment of their own prophecies, God was now bearing to the

* Luke xxiv. 50 ; Acts i. 12.

resurrection of the Messiah, whom, after all the works that he had done in the midst of them, their rulers had crucified, but whom God had exalted. You can thus trace, in the time of conferring these powers, the wise adjustment of means to an end. You see the silence and quietness, which had been maintained after the death of Christ, abundantly compensated by the public manner in which the gospel is first preached. The apostles are directed to submit their claim to the examination of the greatest multitude that could be assembled at Jerusalem; and the report, which this multitude would carry to their own countries of so extraordinary an appearance, was employed as an instrument of preparing many different parts of the world for the preaching of the apostles, who were soon to visit them. The powers themselves are delineated in the Acts and in the Epistles. You read of the word of wisdom, *i.e.* a clear comprehensive view of the Christian scheme—the word of knowledge, probably the faculty of tracing the connexion between the Jewish and Christian dispensation—prophecy, either the applying of the prophecies in the Old Testament, or the foretelling future events—healing—the gift of tongues—the gift of interpreting tongues—and the gift of discerning spirits, *i. e.* perceiving the true character of men under the disguise which they assumed, so as to be able to detect impostors.* There is a variety in these gifts corresponding to all the possible occasions of the teachers of this new religion. Some of them, being external and visible, were the signs and pledges of those which, although invisible, were not

* 1 Cor. xii. 8—10.

less necessary. Some of them were disseminated through the Christian church, and the gifts of healing and of tongues were often conferred by the hands of the apostles upon believers. This abundance of miraculous gifts was proper at that time, to demonstrate to the world the fulness of those treasures which were dispensed by the Lord Jesus, the dignity with which he had invested his apostles, and the obligation which lay upon all Christians to receive his word at their mouth. It was proper to rouse the attention of the world to a new religion, to overcome those considerations of prudence which made them unwilling to forsake the religion of their fathers, and to inspire them with steadfastness in the faith. It was proper also to remove the prejudices which the Jews entertained against the Heathen, and to satisfy those who boasted of the privileges of the law, that God had received the Gentiles. Cornelius and his kinsmen and his friends were the first uncircumcised persons to whom the Gospel was preached. They of the circumcision who believed were astonished when they saw the gift of the Holy Ghost poured out upon them, and heard them speak with tongues. Peter considered this as his warrant to baptize them; and when he reported it afterwards to the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem, they no longer blamed what he had done, but “held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

This abundance of miraculous gifts, which so many reasons rendered proper at the first appearance of Christianity, was gradually withdrawn as the occasions ceased. We have no reason to think that any but the apostles had the power of confer-

ring such gifts upon others. We are not indeed warranted to say that miraculous gifts were never visible in any who had not received them from the hands of the apostles. But we know that in the succeeding generations they became more rare. And when we were speaking of this subject formerly, we found writers in the third, and beginning of the fourth century, acknowledging that only some vestiges of such gifts remained in their days.

If you lay together the several particulars which have been mentioned respecting the economy of these miraculous gifts, it will appear that, as from their nature, they were the unquestionable witness of the Spirit, confirming the testimony which the apostles bore to the resurrection of their Master ; so, in the manner of their being conferred, every wise observer may trace the finger of God. There is none of that waste which betrays ostentation, none of that scantiness or delay which implies a defect of power, no circumstance unworthy of the divine author of them ; but the wisdom and power of God are united in the cause of the Gospel, and the same fitness and dignity, which distinguished the miracles of Jesus, are transferred to the works which his Spirit enabled his apostles to perform.

CHAP. IX.

PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

IN our Lord's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, we meet with these words : " This Gospel of the kingdom shall first be preached to all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come." These words mark the space intervening between the prediction and the termination of the Jewish state, that is, a space of less than forty years, as the period within which the Gospel was to be preached to all nations. When we attended to the fulfilment of this prophecy, we found that the account given in the book of Acts, of the multitude of early converts, of the dispersion of the Christians, and of the success of Paul's labours, is confirmed by the most unexceptionable testimony. We learn from Tacitus, that in the year of our Lord 63, thirty years after his death, there was an immense multitude of Christians in Rome. From the capital of the world, the communication was easy through all the parts of the Roman empire : and no country then discovered was too distant to hear the gospel. Accordingly it is generally agreed, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, Scythia on the north, India on the east, Gaul and Egypt on the west, and

Ethiopia on the south, had received the doctrine of Christ. And Britain, which was then regarded as the extremity of the earth, being frequently visited during that period by Roman emperors or their generals, there is no improbability in what is affirmed by Christian historians, that the gospel was preached in the capital of this island thirty years after the death of our Saviour. The last fact which Scripture contains respecting the propagation of Christianity, is found in the book of Revelation. It appears from the epistles which John was commanded to write to the ministers of the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, that there were, during the life of that apostle, seven regular Christian churches in Asia Minor. We may consider the facts hitherto mentioned as the fulfilment of that prophecy which I quoted. As to the progress of our religion, subsequent to the period marked in the prophecy, we derive no light from the books of the New Testament, because there is none of them which we certainly know to be of a later date than the destruction of Jerusalem. But there are other authentic monuments from which I shall state to you the fact; and then I shall lead you to consider the force of the argument for the truth of Christianity, which has been grounded upon that fact.

The younger Pliny, proconsul of Bithynia, writes in the end of the first century to the emperor Trajan, asking directions as to his conduct with regard to the Christians. The letter of Pliny, the 97th of the 10th book, ought to be familiar to every student in divinity. He represents that many of every age and rank were called to account for bearing the

Christian name ; that the contagion of that superstition had spread not only through the cities, but through the villages and fields ; that the temples had been deserted, and the usual sacrifices neglected. There are extant two apologies for Christianity, written by Justin Martyr, about the middle of the second century, and one by Tertullian before the end of it. These apologies, which were public papers addressed to the emperor and the Roman magistrates, mention with triumph the multitude of Christians. And there is a work of Justin Martyr, entitled a dialogue with Trypho the Jew, published about the year 146, in which he thus speaks. " There is no nation, whether of Barbarians or Greeks, whether they live in waggons or tents, amongst whom prayers are not made to the Father and Creator of all, through the name of the crucified Jesus." Both Christian and heathen writers attest the general diffusion of Christianity through the empire during the third century ; and in the beginning of the fourth, Constantine, the emperor of Rome, declared himself a Christian. If we consider the emperor as acting from conviction, Christianity has reason to boast of the illustrious convert. If we consider him as acting from policy, his finding it necessary to pay such a compliment to the inclinations of the Christians is the strongest testimony of their numbers. After Christianity became, by the declaration of Constantine, the established religion of the empire, it was diffused, under that character, through all the provinces. It was embraced by the barbarous nations who invaded different parts of the empire, and it received the sanction of their authority in the independent kingdoms which they found-

ed. From them it has been handed down to the nations of modern Europe. It is at present professed throughout the most civilized and enlightened part of the world; and it has been carried in the progress of modern discoveries and conquests to remote quarters of the globe, where the arms of Rome never penetrated.

Upon these facts there has been grounded an argument for the truth of our religion. Gamaliel said in the sanhedrim, when the gospel was first preached, "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it."* The counsel has not been overthrown, therefore it is of God. The argument is specious and striking, and, with proper qualifications, it is sound. But much caution is required in stating it. And as I have given you the facts without exaggeration, so it is my duty to suggest the difficulty to which the argument is exposed, and to warn you of the danger of hurting the cause which you mean to serve, by arguing loosely from the success of the gospel.

SECTION I.

WE are not warranted to consider the success of any system which calls itself a religion, as an infallible proof that it is divine. The prejudices, the ignorance, the vices, and follies of men, a particular

* Acts v. 36, 39.

conjuncture of circumstances, and the skilful application of human means, may procure a favourable reception for an imposture, and may give the belief of its divinity so firm possession of the minds of men, as to render its reputation permanent. We justly infer from the moral attributes of God that he will not invest a false prophet with extraordinary powers. But we are not warranted to infer that he will interpose in a miraculous manner to remove the delusion of those who submit their understandings to be misled by the arts of cunning men. He has given us reason, by the right use of which we may distinguish truth from falsehood. He leaves us to suffer the natural consequences of neglecting to exercise our reason; and it is presumptuous to say that there can be no fraud in a scheme, because the Almighty, for the wise purposes of his government, or in just judgment upon those who had not the love of the truth, permitted that scheme to be successful.

As the reason of the thing suggests that success is not an unequivocal proof of the divine original of any system, so the providence of God has afforded Christians a striking lesson how careful they ought to be in qualifying the argument deduced from the propagation of Christianity. For, in the seventh century of the Christian era, there arose an individual in Arabia, who, although he be regarded by every rational inquirer as an impostor, was able to introduce a religious system, which in less than a century spread through Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Persia, which has subsisted in vigour for more than eleven hundred years, and is at this day the established religion of a portion of the world

much larger than Christendom. The followers of Mahomet triumph in the extended dominion of the author of their faith. But a Christian, who understands the method of defending his religion, has no reason to be shaken by the empty boast. For thus stands the argument. When we are able to point out the human causes which have produced any event, the existence of that event is no decisive proof of a divine interposition. But when all the means that were employed appear inadequate to the end, we are obliged to have recourse to the finger of God; and the inference, which arises from our being unable to give any other account of the end, will be drawn without hesitation, if there be positive evidence that, in the accomplishment of the end, there was an exertion of divine power.

When you apply this universal rule in trying the argument which appears at first sight to be equally implied in the success of the two religions, you find the history of the one so clearly discriminated from the history of the other, that the inference, which a proper examination of circumstances enables a Christian to draw from the success of the Gospel, does in no degree belong to the disciples of Mahomet. The best guide whom you can follow in making this discrimination is Mr. White, who, availing himself of that acquaintance with eastern literature to which his inclination and his profession had conspired to direct him, has published a volume of Sermons, entitled, *A Comparative View of Christianity and Mahometanism*, in their history, their evidence, and their effects. There is in these sermons much valuable and uncommon information combined with great judgment, and expressed in a nervous and elevated

style. They meet many of the objections of modern times, and form one of the most complete and masterly defences of the truth of Christianity. You will learn from him, better than from any other writer, the favourable circumstances to which Mahomet owed his success. And the short picture, which I am now to give you of these circumstances, is little more than an abridgment of some of Mr. White's sermons.

Born in an ignorant uncivilized country, and amidst independent tribes of idolatrous Arabs, when the Roman empire was attacked on every side by barbarians, when the Christian world was torn with dissension about inexplicable points of controversy, when the simplicity of the gospel was corrupted, and when Christian charity was forgotten in the bitterness of mutual persecution, Mahomet, who possessed strong natural talents, saw the possibility of rising to eminence as the great reformer of religion. Having waited till his own mind was matured by meditation, and till he had established in the minds of his neighbours an opinion of his sanctity, he began at the age of forty to deliver chapters of the Koran. During the long space of twenty-three years, he had an opportunity of trying the sentiments of his countrymen. By successive communications he corrected what had proved disagreeable, and he accommodated his system so as to give the least possible offence to Jews, or Christians, or idolaters. He admitted the divine mission of Moses and of Jesus. He inculcated the unity of God, which is a fundamental article of the Jewish and Christian religions, and which was not denied by many of the surrounding idolaters. From the Old and New Testament he borrowed ma-

ny sublime descriptions of the Deity, and much excellent morality ; and all this he mixed with the childish traditions and fables of Arabia, with a toleration of many idolatrous rites, and with an indulgence to the vices of the climate. And thus the Koran is not a new system discovering the invention of its author, but an artful motley mixture, made up of the shreds of different opinions, without order or consistency, full of repetitions and absurdities, yet presenting to every one something agreeable to his prejudices, expressed in the captivating language of the country, and often adorned with the graces of poetry. To his illiterate countrymen such a work appeared marvellous. The artifice and elegance with which its discordant materials were combined so far surpassed their inexperience and rudeness, that they gave credit to the declaration of Mahomet, who said it was delivered to him by the angel Gabriel. The Koran became the standard of taste and composition to the Arabians ; and the blind admiration of those who knew no rival to its excellence was easily transformed into a belief of its divinity.

In the beginning of his scheme, Mahomet met with much opposition, and he was obliged at one time to fly from Mecca to Medina. His reputation had prepared for him a favourable reception in that city. His address, his superior knowledge, and the influence of his connections, soon gathered round him a small party, with which he began to make those predatory excursions, which have, in every age, been most agreeable to the character of the Arabs. Mahomet pretended, that as all gentle methods of reforming mankind had proved ineffectual, the Almighty had armed him with the power of the sword ;

and he went forth to compel men to receive the great prophet of heaven. His talents as a leader, the success of his first expeditions, and the hope of booty, increased the number of his followers. It was not long before he united into one body the tribes of Arabs who flocked around his standard; and at the time of his death he was meditating distant conquests. The magnificent project which he had conceived and begun was executed with ability and success by the caliphs, to whom he transmitted his temporal and his spiritual power. They led the Arabs to invade the neighbouring provinces, and by their victorious arms they founded, upon the religion of the Koran, an empire, which the joint influence of ambition and enthusiasm continued for ages to extend.

Mahomet, then, is not to be classed with the teachers of piety and virtue, whose success may be considered as an example of the power of truth over the mind. He ranks with those conquerors whom the spirit of enterprise and a concurrence of circumstances have conducted from a humble station to renown and to empire. He is distinguished from them chiefly by calling in religion to his aid; and his sagacity in employing so useful an auxiliary is made manifest by the progress and the permanence of his scheme. But the means were all human; the only assistance which Mahomet pretended to receive from heaven consisted of the revelation which dictated to him the Koran, and the strength which crowned him with victory. How far a revelation was necessary for the composition of the Koran may be left to the decision of any person of taste and judgment who remembers, when he reads it, that Mahomet was in posses-

sion of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. How far the strength of heaven was necessary to give victory to Mahomet may be left to the judgment of any one who compares the spirit of the Arabs, influenced and directed by the character and the views of their leader, with the wretched condition of those whom they conquered. Yet these were the only pretences to a divine mission which Mahomet made. He declared that he had no commission to work miracles ; and he appealed to no other prophecies than those which are contained in our Scriptures.

And thus, as the introduction of his scheme did not imply the exercise of supernatural powers, as no positive unequivocal evidence of his possessing such powers was ever adduced, so his success may be fully accounted for by human means. The more that an intelligent reader is conversant with the Koran, he discerns the more clearly the internal marks of imposture ; and the more that he is conversant with the manners of the times in which Mahomet lived, and with the history of the progress of his empire, he is the less surprised at the propagation and the continuance of that imposture.

When you turn from this picture to view the history of the progress of Christianity, the striking contrast will appear to you to warrant the conclusion which the followers of Jesus are accustomed to draw from the success of his religion.

In a province of the Roman empire, after it had reached the summit of its glory, and in the Augustan age, the most enlightened period of Roman history, there appeared a Teacher delivering openly, in the temple and the synagogue, the purest morality, the most spiritual institutions of worship, and the

most exalted theology, not in a systematical form, but in occasional discourses, and in the simplest language. He committed his instructions, not to writing, but to a few illiterate men who had been his companions ; and the number of his disciples after he was crucified by the voice of his countrymen, did not exceed 120. His apostles, in teaching what they had received from their Master, had to encounter an opposition which, in all human rules of judging, was sufficient to create an insurmountable obstacle to the progress of their doctrine. They had to combat the vices of an age which, according to all the pictures that have been drawn of it, appears to have exceeded the usual measure of corruption. Yet they did not accommodate their precepts to the manners of the world, but denounced the wrath of God against all unrighteousness of men, against practices which were nearly universal, and the indulgence of passions which were esteemed innocent or laudable. They had to combat what is generally more obstinate than vice, the religious spirit of the times ; for they commanded men “ to turn from idols to serve the living God.” That reverence for public institutions which even an unbeliever may feel, that attachment to received opinions, that fondness for ancient practices, and those prejudices of education which always animate narrow minds, united with the influence of the priests, and of all the artists who lived by ministering to the magnificence of the temples, against the teachers of this new doctrine. The zeal of the worshippers, revived by the return of those festivals at which the Christians refused to partake, often broke forth with fury. The Christians were considered as atheists ; and it was thought

that the wrath of the gods could not be better appeased than by pouring every indignity and abuse upon men who presumed to despise their worship. The wise men in that enlightened age, who rose above the superstition of their countrymen, although they joined with the Christians in thinking contemptuously of the gods, were not disposed to give any countenance to the teachers of this new system. They despised the simplicity of its form, so different from the subtleties of the schools. When at any time they condescended to listen to its doctrines, they found some of them inconsistent with their received opinions, and mortifying to the pride of reason. They confounded with the popular superstitions a doctrine which professed to enlighten the great body of the people, and they condemned the prohibition of idolatry: for it was their principle, that philosophers might dispute and doubt concerning religion as they pleased, but that it was their duty, as good citizens, to conform to the established modes of worship. Upon these grounds, Christianity was so far from being favourably received by the heathen philosophers, that it was early opposed and ridiculed by them; and they continued to write against it after the empire had become Christian.

The unbelieving Jews were the bitterest enemies of the Christian faith. They beheld with peculiar indignation the progress of a doctrine, which not only invaded the prerogative of the law of Moses, by claiming to be a divine revelation, but even professed to supersede that law, to abolish the distinctions which it had established, and to enlighten those whom it left in darkness. National pride, and the bigotry of the Jewish spirit, were alarmed.

The rulers, who had crucified the Lord Jesus, continued to employ all the power left them by the Romans in persecuting his servants ; and the sufferings of the first Christians arose from the envy, the jealousy, and fear of a state, which the prophecies of their Master had devoted to destruction.

It was not long before the Christians felt the indignation of the Roman emperors and magistrates. The Roman law guarded the established religion against the introduction of any new modes of worship which had not received the sanction of public authority ; and it was a principle of Roman policy to repress private meetings, as the nurseries of sedition. “ Ab nullo genere,” says M. Porcius Cato, in a speech preserved by Livy, “ non æque summum periculum est, si cœtus, et concilia, et secretas consultationes esse sinas.” * Upon this principle, the Christians, who separated themselves from the established worship, and held secret assemblies for the observance of their own rites, were considered as rebellious subjects : and when they multiplied in the empire, it was judged necessary to restrain them. Pliny, in the letter to which I referred, says to Trajan, “ Secundum tua mandata ἐταρξιας esse vetueram ;” and Trajan, in his answer, requires that every person who was accused of being a Christian should vindicate himself from the charge, by offering sacrifice to the gods. “ Conquirendi non sunt ; si deferentur et arguentur puniendi sunt ; ita tamen ut qui negaverit se Christianum esse, idque re ipsa manifestum fecerit, id est, supplicando deis nostris, quamvis suspectus in præteritum fuerit, veniam ex pœnitentia impetret.”

* Liv. xxxiv. 2.

It was not always from the profligacy or cruelty of the emperors that the sufferings of the Christians flowed. Some of the best princes who ever filled the Roman throne, men who were an ornament to human nature, and whose administration was a blessing to their subjects, felt themselves bound, by respect for the established religion, and care of the public peace, to execute the laws against this new society, the principles of whose union appeared formidable, because they were not understood. Accordingly, ecclesiastical historians have numbered ten persecutions before the conversion of Constantine; and an innumerable company of martyrs are said to have sealed their testimony with their blood, and to have exhibited amidst the most cruel sufferings a fortitude, resignation, and forgiveness, which not only demonstrated their firm conviction of the truths which they attested, but conveyed to every impartial spectator an impression that these men were assisted by a divine power, which raised them above the weakness of humanity. Voltaire, Gibbon, and other enemies of Christianity, aware of the force of that argument which arises from the multitude of the Christian martyrs, and from the spirit with which they endured the severity of their sufferings, have insinuated that there is much exaggeration in the accounts of this matter; that the generous spirit of Roman policy rendered it impossible that there should be an imperial edict enjoining a general persecution; that although the people might be incensed against the obstinacy and sullenness of the Christians, the magistrates, in their different provinces, were their protectors; that there was no wanton barbarity in

the manner of their sufferings; and that none lost their lives, but such as, by provoking a death in which they gloried, put it out of the power of the magistrates to save them.

It is natural for a friend to humanity, and an admirer of Roman manners, to wish that this apology were true; and it is not unlikely that the vanity of Christian historians, indignation against their persecutors, and the habits of rhetorical declamation, have swelled, in their descriptions, the numbers of the martyrs. It is most likely that the mob were more furious than the magistrates; that those who were entrusted with the execution of the Roman laws would observe the spirit of them in the mode of trying persons accused of Christianity; and that the governors of provinces might, upon several occasions, restrain the eagerness with which the Christians were sought after, and the brutality and iniquity with which they were treated. But, after all these allowances, any person who studies the history of the Christian church will perceive that there is much false colouring in the apology which has been made for the Roman magistrates; and we can produce incontestible evidence, the concurring testimony of Christian and heathen writers, that, upon the principles which have been explained, Christianity was publicly discouraged in all parts of the Roman empire; and that, although favourable circumstances procured some intervals of respite, there were many seasons when this religion was persecuted by order of the emperors—when the Christians were liable to imprisonment and confiscation of their estates—and when death, in some of its most terrifying forms,

was inflicted upon those, who, being brought before the tribunals, refused to abjure the name of Christ.

Such was the complicated opposition which the apostles of Jesus had to encounter. Yet the measure of their success was such as I have stated. Without the aid of power, or wealth, or popular prejudices; without accommodation to reigning vices and opinions; without drawing the sword, or fomenting sedition, or encouraging the admiration of their followers to confer upon them any earthly honours—but by humble, peaceable, laborious teaching, they diffused through a great part of the Roman empire the knowledge of a new doctrine; they turned many from the idols which they had worshipped, and from the enormities which they had practised, to serve the living God; and this spiritual system advanced under every discouragement, till the conversion, or the policy, of Constantine rendered it the established religion of the Roman empire. All speculations concerning the contagion of example, the zeal that is kindled by persecution, the power of vanity, and the love of the marvellous, are visionary, when you apply them to account for the change which Christianity made during the three first centuries. That multitudes in every country, and of every age and rank, should forsake the religion in which they had been educated, and embrace one which was much stricter, and which brought no worldly advantage, but exposed them to the heaviest afflictions; that they should be thus converted by the preaching of mean men; and that their conversion should appear in the reformation of their lives as well as in the alteration of their worship, is a phenomenon of which we require some cause, whose influence does not de-

pend upon refined speculations, but is real and permanent: and not being able to find any such cause in the human means that were employed, we are led by the principles of our nature to acknowledge the interposition of the Almighty.

But this is the very conclusion to which we were formerly conducted. It is said in their books that God bare witness to the apostles by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost. And there is as clear historical evidence as the nature of the case admits of, that this assertion is true. The change, then, which we have been contemplating, is no longer unaccountable. Miracles wrought by the first teachers of Christianity were sufficient to rouse the attention of the world even in the most superstitious age, and the argument employed in them was so plain as to be level to every understanding, and so powerful, that we are not surprised at its overcoming, in the breasts of those who beheld them, all considerations of prudence and expediency. The eye-witnesses of the miracles, yielding to the demonstration of the Spirit, gave glory to God by receiving his servants; and when the signs done by the hands of the apostles were transmitted to succeeding ages, attested by an innumerable cloud of witnesses, the certain knowledge that they had been wrought produced in the minds of numbers a full conviction, that the religion of Jesus was introduced into the world by the mighty power of God.

Thus, then, stands the argument arising from the propagation of Christianity. The human means appear wholly inadequate to the effect. But there is positive evidence of a divine interposition; and if that be admitted, the effect may easily be explained,

The two parts of the argument illustrate one another. The miracles, which we receive upon a strong concurring testimony, enable us to assign the cause of the propagation of Christianity ; and the knowledge of that propagation, which we derive from history, reflects additional light and credibility upon the miracles. The discrimination between the success of Mahomet and the establishment of Christianity is so clear and striking, that we may with perfect fairness apply the reasoning of Gamaliel to the latter, although we do not admit that it has any force when applied to the former.

These are the principles upon which you may safely argue from the success of the gospel that it is of divine origin. But although the argument, when thus stated, approves itself to every candid mind as sound and conclusive, there are still several difficulties respecting the propagation of Christianity.

SECTION II.

I MENTION, first, an objection, which a celebrated part of the writings of Mr. Gibbon has suggested, to the account given in the preceding Section. The 15th chapter in his first volume professes to be a candid, but rational inquiry into the progress and establishment of Christianity. “ Our curiosity is naturally prompted to inquire by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth. To this in-

quiry, an obvious but satisfactory answer may be returned ; that it was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and to the ruling Providence of its great Author. But as truth and reason seldom find so favourable a reception in the world, and as the wisdom of Providence frequently condescends to use the passions of the human heart and the general circumstances of mankind as instruments to execute its purpose, we may still be permitted, though with becoming submission, to ask, not indeed what were the first, but what were the secondary causes of the rapid growth of the Christian church."

The soundest divine might have used this language. We acknowledge that the Providence of God condescends to employ various instruments to execute his purpose ; and therefore, while we affirm that the manifestation of the power of God was the great mean of overcoming those prejudices, which prevented the easy admission of truth and reason into the minds of the first hearers of the gospel, we admit that there were also means prepared by the providence of God to facilitate the progress of this religion. But it happens that Mr. Gibbon is doing the office of an enemy, while he speaks the language of a friend. His object is to show, that the joint operation of the five secondary causes, which he enumerates, is sufficient to account for the propagation of Christianity ; and the influence which the whole chapter tends to convey to the mind of the reader, although it be nowhere expressed, is this, that there is not any occasion for having recourse, in this matter, to the ruling providence of God. The five secondary causes enumerated by Mr. Gibbon are these, 1. " The inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christ-

ians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses." 2. "The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth." 3. "The miraculous powers of the primitive church." 4. "The virtues of the primitive Christians." 5. "The union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman empire."

Mr. Gibbon's illustration of these five causes is not a logical discussion of their influence upon the propagation of Christianity, such as might have been expected from his manly understanding. But it is filled with digressions, which, although they often detract from the influence of the causes, serve a purpose more interesting to the author than the illustration of that influence, by presenting a degrading view of the religion which these causes are said to promote. It is filled with indirect sarcastic insinuations, with partial representations of facts and arguments, and with very strained uses of quotations and authorities. I consider the fifteenth chapter of Mr. Gibbon's history as the most uncandid attack which has been made upon Christianity in modern times. The eminent abilities, the brilliant style, and the high reputation of the author, render it particularly dangerous to those whose information is not extensive: and therefore I recommend to you, not to abstain from reading it. Such a recommendation would imply some distrust of the cause which Mr. Gibbon has attacked, and a compliance with it would be very

unbecoming an inquirer after truth. But I recommend to you to read along with this chapter some of the answers that have been made to it. I know no book that has been so completely answered. The author, indeed, continues to discover the same virulence against Christianity in the subsequent volumes of his work, upon subjects of less importance than the causes of its propagation, and where the indecent controversies amongst Christians give him the appearance of a triumph in the eyes of those, who confound true religion with the corruptions of it. But any person who has examined the fifteenth chapter with due care, and with a sufficient measure of information, must, I think, entertain such an opinion of the inveteracy of Mr. Gibbon's prejudices against Christianity, and of the arts which those prejudices have made him stoop to employ, as may fortify his mind against any inclination to commit himself to a guide so unsafe in every thing which concerns religion.

When you attend to the nature of the five secondary causes, you are at a loss to conceive how they come to be ranked in the place which Mr. Gibbon assigns them. If by the intolerant and inflexible zeal of the first Christians be meant their ardour and activity in promoting a religion which they believed to be divine, we readily admit that the labours of the apostles and their successors were an instrument by which God spread the knowledge of the gospel. But this cause is so far from accounting for the conviction which the first teachers themselves had of the facts which they attested, that their ardour and activity is incredible, unless it proceeded from this conviction; and the kind of inflexibility and intole-

rance of the idolatry and the vices of the world, which was necessarily connected with their conviction of the great facts of Christianity, was more likely to deter than to invite men to embrace it. If by the doctrine of a future life be meant the hope of life eternal, which is held forth with assurance in the gospel to the penitent, this is so essential a branch of the excellence of the doctrine, that it cannot, with any propriety, be called a secondary cause; and those adventitious circumstances which Mr. Gibbon represents as connected with this hope, he means the speedy dissolution of the world, and the reign of Christ with his saints upon earth for a thousand years, commonly called the Millennium, appear to every rational inquirer to have no foundation in Scripture, and never to have formed any part of the teaching of the apostles. If by the miraculous powers of the primitive church be meant the demonstration of the Spirit, which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel in the signs and wonders done by the hands of the apostles, this is manifestly a part of the ruling providence of its great Master. It is not denied that the miracles, which rest upon unexceptionable historical evidence, were succeeded by many pretensions to miraculous powers after this gift of the Spirit was withdrawn. But it is not easy to conceive how these pretensions obtained any credit in the Christian church, unless it was certainly known that many real miracles had been wrought; and it is obvious that the multitude of delusions which were practised tended to discredit the gospel in the eye of every rational inquirer, and, instead of promoting the success of the new religion, was most likely to confound it with those Pagan fables which

it commanded men to forsake. The virtues of the primitive Christians were exhibited in circumstances so trying, that they recommended the new religion most powerfully to the world. But these virtues, which were the native expression of faith in the gospel, and the fruit of the Spirit, must be resolved into the excellence of the doctrine. Mr. Gibbon, indeed, has drawn under this head a picture of the manners of the primitive Christians, which holds them up to the ridicule and censure, not to the admiration, of the world. The colouring of this picture has been discovered to be, in many places, false and extravagant: and this glaring inconsistency strikes every person who attends to it, that an author who assigns the virtues of the primitive Christians as a cause of the propagation of Christianity, chooses to degrade that religion by such a representation of these virtues, as, if it were true, would satisfy every reader that they had no influence in producing the effect which he ascribes to them.

In stating the last cause, there is an obvious inaccuracy, which Mr. Gibbon would not have been guilty of upon another subject. He is professing to account for the *rapid* growth of the Christian church. His fifth cause is the union and discipline of the Christian republic, which *gradually* formed an independent state; and his account of the manner of its formation extends through the three first centuries of the Christian era. It matters not to the subject upon which it is introduced, whether the account be just or false; for it is manifest that the *rapid* growth of the Christian church in the first and second centuries cannot be ascribed to the union and

discipline of the Christian republic, which was not completed till after the third century.

You will perceive by the short specimen which I have given, that the danger of Mr. Gibbon's book does not arise from his having discovered five secondary causes of the propagation of Christianity, to which the world had not formerly attended. It arises from the manner in which he has illustrated them: and the only way to obviate the danger is to canvass his illustration very closely. There is very complete assistance provided for you in this exercise.

Mr. White has touched upon Mr. Gibbon's five causes shortly, but ably, in his *Comparative View of Mahometanism and Christianity*. Bishop Watson, in his *Apology for Christianity*, has given, with much animation, and without any personal abuse, a concise clear argument upon every one of the five causes, which appears to me to show in the most satisfactory manner, that they do not answer the purpose for which they are introduced, and that it is still necessary to have recourse to the ruling providence of the great Author of Christianity in order to account for its propagation. After Bishop Watson's *Apology* was published, an answer was made to this 15th chapter, by Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, entitled, *An Inquiry into the secondary causes which Mr. Gibbon assigns for the rapid growth of Christianity*. Sir David was peculiarly fitted for such an inquiry. He had an acute distinguishing mind, enriched with a very uncommon measure of theological reading, and capable of the most patient minute investigation. He was a zealous friend of Christian-

ity. And he has applied his talents with great success in hunting out every misrepresentation and contradiction into which Mr. Gibbon was betrayed by his favourite object. There is not so much general reasoning in the Inquiry as in the Apology. But Lord Hailes has sifted the 15th chapter thoroughly. He treats his antagonist with decency, and yet he triumphs over him in so many instances, and brings conviction home to the reader in so pointed a manner, that he is warranted to draw the conclusion which I shall give you in the moderate terms that he has chosen to employ. “ Mr. Gibbon’s first proposition is, that Christianity became victorious over the established religions of the earth, by its very doctrine, and by the ruling providence of its great Author ; and his last, of a like import, is, that Christianity is the truth. Between his first and his last propositions there are, no doubt, many dissertations, digressions, inferences, and hints, not altogether consistent with his avowed principles. But much allowance ought to be made for that love of novelty which seduces men of genius to think and speak rashly ; and for that easiness of belief, which inclines us to rely on the quotations and commentaries of confident persons, without examining the authors of whom they speak. From a review of all that he has said, it appears that the things which Mr. Gibbon considered as secondary or human causes, efficaciously promoting the Christian religion, either tended to retard its progress, or were the manifest operations of the wisdom and power of God.”

SECTION III.

As Mr. Gibbon dwells upon secondary causes, it occurs in this place to mention the rank and character of those who were converted to Christianity in early times. It is obvious to observe, that although the condition and circumstances of the first teachers had been ever so mean, if by any accident their doctrine had been instantly adopted by men of superior knowledge or of commanding influence, there might have been, in this way, created a secondary cause, sufficient, in some measure, to account for the propagation of Christianity. But the fact long continued to correspond to the description given by the apostle Paul, not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble were called. But God employed the foolish to confound the wise, and those who were despised to confound those who were highly esteemed, that no flesh might glory in his presence, and that the excellency of the power might appear to be of him.* Yet even here a bound was set by the wisdom of God. Had Christianity been embraced in early times only by the ignorant vulgar, it might have been degraded in the eyes of succeeding ages ; and the universal indifference or unbelief of those, whose understandings had received any degree of culture and enlargement, might have conveyed to careless observers an impression that this new religion was an irrational, mean superstition. To obviate this objection, even the Scriptures mention the names of many persons

* 1 Cor. i. 26, 27, 28 ; 2 Cor. iv. 7.

of superior rank who embraced Christianity at its first publication : and we know, that during the two first centuries, men completely versed in all the learning of the times left the schools of the philosophers, and employed their talents and their knowledge in explaining and defending the doctrines of Christ. Quadratus and Aristides were Athenian philosophers, who flourished in the very beginning of the second century, and who continued to wear the dress of philosophers after they became Christians. Their apologies for Christianity are quoted by very ancient historians ; but the quotations made from them are the only parts of them now extant. We still have several works of Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century. In his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, he gives an account of the time and attention which he had bestowed upon the study of Platonism, and the admiration in which he once held that doctrine. But now, he says, having been acquainted with the prophets and those men who were the friends of Jesus, I have found that this is the only safe and useful philosophy. And thus I have become a philosopher indeed. *Ταυτην μονον ευρισκον φιλοσοφiam ασφαλη τε και συμφερον.*

There was one early convert to Christianity, whose attainments and whose character may well be considered as constituting a most powerful secondary cause in its propagation. I mean the apostle Paul, a learned Pharisee, bred at the feet of Gamaliel, a man of an ardent elevated mind, and of a strong well-cultivated understanding, who laboured more abundantly than all the apostles, with indefatigable zeal, and with peculiar advantages. But it is remarkable that this man, in preaching the Gos-

pel, did not avail himself of all the arts which he had learned to employ. His knowledge of the law was used not to support, but to overturn the system in which he had been bred. There is not in his writings the most distant approach to the forms of Grecian or Asiatic eloquence ; and there is a freedom and a severity in his reproofs, very different from the courtly manner which his education might have formed. His conversion is, in itself, an illustrious argument of the truth of Christianity. You will find the force of this argument well stated in a treatise of the first Lord Lyttelton, entitled, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul* ; one of those classical essays which every student of divinity should read. The elegant and amiable writer, whose name is dear to every man of taste and virtue, demonstrates the following points with a beautiful persuasive simplicity. 1. The supposition, neither of enthusiasm nor of imposture, is sufficient to account for the conversion of this apostle ; 2. The character of his mind, and the history of his life, conspire in confirming the narration so often repeated in the book of Acts ; 3. That narration involves in it the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, the great fact which the apostles witnessed ; 4. Paul had had no opportunity of holding any previous concert with the other apostles, but was completely separated from them ; 5. His situation gave him the most perfect access to know whether there was truth in the report published by them, as witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus ; and therefore his concurrence with the other apostles, in publishing that report, and preaching the doctrine founded upon it, is an accession of new evidence after the first promulgation

of Christianity. The force of this new evidence will always remain with those who acknowledge the books of the New Testament to be authentic. And, for the benefit of the Christians who lived before the books were published, it was wisely contrived that the new evidence should arise out of the history of that man whose labours contributed most largely to the conversion of the world, so that in the very person from whom they received their faith, they had a demonstration of its being divine.

And thus you observe, that while the humble station of the rest of the apostles necessarily leads us to a divine interposition, as the only mean of qualifying such men for being the instructors of the world, the condition and education of the apostle Paul, which furnished a secondary cause that was useful in the propagation of Christianity, do, at the same time, render his conversion such an argument for the truth of that religion, as is much more than sufficient to counterbalance all the advantages which it could possibly derive from his knowledge and his talents. All this you will find illustrated in a very full life of St. Paul, which Dr. Macknight has prefixed to his commentary on the epistles.

SECTION IV.

I HAVE stated the qualifications which are necessary in order to render the argument arising from the propagation of Christianity sound and conclusive; I

have suggested the manner of obviating the objections contained in Mr. Gibbon's account of the secondary causes which promoted the rapid growth of the Christian church ; and I have marked the argument implied in the conversion of the apostle Paul.

All that I have hitherto said respects the means employed in propagating the Gospel. But there is another set of objections that will often meet you respecting the measure of the effect which these means have produced. " If the Gospel was really introduced by the mighty power of God, why was it not published much earlier ? It is as easy for the Almighty to exert his power at one time as at another, yet the world was four thousand years old before the Gospel appeared. Why is this beneficent religion diffused through so small a portion of the globe ? It has been said that if our earth be divided into thirty equal parts, Paganism is established in nineteen of those parts, Mahometanism in six, and Christianity only in five. Why have the evil passions of men been permitted to mingle themselves with the work of God ? Why has the sword of the persecutor been called in to aid the counsel of heaven ? Why does the Gospel now spread so slowly, that the triumphs of this religion seem to have ceased not many centuries after they began ? Why has a system, in support of which the Ruler of the universe condescended to make bare his holy arm, degenerated, throughout a great part of the Christian world, into a corrupt form, very far removed from its original simplicity ? And why is its influence over the hearts and lives of men so inconsiderable, even in those countries where the truth is taught as it is in Christ Jesus ? This partiality, and delay,

and imperfection in the propagation of the Gospel resembles very much the work of man, whose limited operations correspond to the scantiness of his power. But all this is very unlike the word of the Almighty, which runneth swiftly throughout the whole earth, to execute all the extent of the gracious purpose formed by the Universal Father of mankind."

I have stated these objections in one view with all their force. You will find them not only urged seriously in the works of deistical writers, but thrown out lightly and scoffingly in conversation, so that it behoves you very much to be well apprized of the manner of answering them. It is impossible for me to enter into any detail upon this subject; but I shall suggest to you, in the six following propositions, the heads of answers to all objections of this kind, leaving them to be enlarged and applied by your own reading.

1. Observe that these questions, were they much more pointed and unanswerable than they are, could not have the effect to overturn historical evidence. If there be positive satisfying testimony that the divine power was exerted in support of Christianity at its first promulgation, our being unable to account for the particular measure of the effect which that exertion has produced does not, by any clear connection of premises with a conclusion, invalidate the testimony, but only discovers our ignorance of the ways of God; and this is an ignorance which we feel upon every other subject, which, in judging of the works of nature, we never admit as an argument against matter of fact, and which any person, who has just impressions of the limited powers of man, and the immense extent of the divine counsels, will

not consider as of weight when applied to the evidences of religion.

2. Observe that all the questions imply an expectation that God will bestow the same religious advantages upon the children of men in every age and country. But, as no person who understands the terms which he uses, will say that God is bound in justice to distribute his favours equally to all his creatures, so no person who attends to the course of Divine Providence will be led to draw any such expectation as the questions imply, from the conduct of the Almighty in other matters. Recollect the diversities of the human species, the differences amongst individuals, in vigour of constitution, in bodily accomplishments, in the powers of understanding, in temper and passions, in the opportunities of improvement, and the measure of comfort and enjoyment, or of toil and sorrow, which their situations afford. Recollect the differences amongst nations in climate, in government, in the amount of natural and political advantages, and in the whole sum of national prosperity. It is impossible for us to conceive how the subordination of society could be maintained, if all men had the same talents; or how the course of human affairs could proceed, if every part of the globe was like every other. Being thus accustomed to behold and to admire the varieties in the natural advantages of men, we are prepared, by the analogy of the works of God, to expect like varieties in their religious advantages; and although we may not be able to trace all the reasons why the light of the Gospel was so long of appearing, or is at present so unequally distributed, yet if we bear in mind that this is but the beginning of

our existence, and that every man shall, in the end, be dealt with according to that which had been given him, we shall not for a moment annex the idea of injustice to this part of the Divine conduct.'

3. Observe that these questions imply an expectation, that, while human works admit of preparation, the work of God will, in every case, be done instantly. But it is manifest that this expectation also is contradicted by the whole course of nature. For although God may, by a word of his mouth, do all his pleasure, yet he generally chooses, for wise reasons, some of which we are often able to trace, to employ means, and to allow such a gradual operation of those means, as admits of a progress, in which one thing paves the way for another, and gives notice of its approach. In all that process by which food for man and beast is brought out of the ground—in the opening of the human mind from infancy to manhood—and in those natural changes which affect the bowels or the surface of the earth, we profit very much by marking the slow advances of nature to its end; and therefore we need not be surprised to find the steps of Divine Providence in the publication of the Gospel very different from the haste, which, in our imagination, appears desirable. As there is a time of maturity in natural productions to which all the preparation has tended, so the Gospel appeared at that season which is styled in Scripture the fulness of time, and which is found, upon a close attention to circumstances, to have been the fittest for such a revelation. There is an excellent sermon upon this subject by Principal Robertson, which you will find in the "Scots Preacher," distinguished by that soundness of thought, and that compass of

historical information, which his other writings may lead you to expect. The same subject will often meet you in the books that you read upon the deistical controversy; and when you attend to the complete illustration which it has received from the writings of many learned men, you will be satisfied that, as the need of an extraordinary revelation was at that time become manifest, so the improvements of science, and the political state of the world, conspired to render the age in which the Gospel appeared better qualified than any preceding age for examining the evidences of a revelation, for affording many striking confirmations of its divine original, and for conveying it with ease and advantage to future ages. The preparation which produced this fulness of time had been carrying forward during 4000 years; and nearly 2000 have elapsed, while Christianity has been spreading through a fifth part of the globe. But this slowness, so agreeable to the general course of nature, will not appear to you inconsistent with the wisdom or goodness of the Almighty, when you,

4. Observe that in all this there was a preparation for the universal diffusion of the Gospel. A considerable measure of religious knowledge was diffused through the world before the appearance of the Gospel; and the delay of its universal publication has perhaps already contributed, and may be so disposed in future as to contribute still more, to prepare the world for receiving it. The few simple doctrines of that traditional religion which existed before the deluge, were transmitted, by the longevity of the patriarchs, through very few hands for the first 1400 years of the world. Methuselah lived

many years with Adam ; Shem lived many years with Methuselah ; and Abraham lived with Shem till he was 75. Between Adam and Abraham there were only two intermediate links ; yet a chain of tradition, extending through nearly 1700 years, and embracing the creation, the fall, and the promise of a Saviour, was preserved. The calling of Abraham, although it conferred peculiar advantages upon his family, was fitted, by his character and situation, to enlighten his neighbours ; and the whole history of the Jewish people—their sojourning in Egypt, the place which they were destined to inhabit, their conquests, and the captivities by which they were afterwards scattered over the face of the earth, rendered them, in an eminent degree, the lights of the world. Bryant, in his “ Mythology,” and men who have applied to such investigations, have traced, with much probability, a resemblance to the Mosaic system in the religions of many of the neighbouring nations ; and if we pay any attention to the force of the instances in which this resemblance has been illustrated, even although we should not give credit to all the conjectures that have been advanced, we can hardly entertain a doubt that the revelation with which the Jews were favoured was a source of instruction to other people. During the existence of this peculiar religion wise men were raised, by the providence of God, in many countries, who did not, indeed, pretend to be the messengers of heaven, but whose discoveries exposed the growing corruptions of the established systems, or whose laws imposed some restraint upon the excesses of superstition ; while the progress of society, and the advancement of reason, opened the minds of men to a more per-

fect instruction than they had formerly been qualified to receive.

These hints suggest this enlarged view of the economy of Divine Providence, that God in no age left himself without a witness, and that the several dispensations of religion, in ancient times, both to Jews and heathens, were adapted to the circumstances of the human race, so as to lead them forward by a gradual education from times of infancy and childhood to the rational sublime system unfolded in the Gospel.

It is following out the same view, to consider the partial propagation of the Gospel as intended to prepare the world for receiving it. Many of the heathen moralists, who lived after the days of our Saviour, discover more refined notions of God, and more enlarged conceptions of the duties of man, than any of their predecessors. They profited by the Gospel, although they did not acknowledge the obligation; and they disseminated some part of its instruction, although they disdained to appear as its ministers. The Koran inculcates the unity of God, and retains a part of the Christian morality; and thus the successful accommodating religion of Mahomet may be considered as a step, by which the providence of God is to lead the nations that have embraced it from the absurdities of Paganism to the true faith. When Christianity became the established religion of the Roman empire the other parts of the world were very far behind in civilization, and many of the countries that have been lately discovered are in the rudest state of society. But the conversion of savage tribes to a spiritual rational system is impracticable. Much time is necessary to open their under-

standings, to give them habits of industry and order, and to render them, in some measure, acquainted with ideas and manners more polished than their own. A long intercourse with the nations of Europe, who appear fitted by their character to be the instructors of the rest of the world, may be the mean appointed by God for removing the prejudices of idolatry and ignorance ; and as the enlightened discoveries of modern times make us acquainted with the manners, the views, and the interests, as well as with the geographical situation of all the inhabitants of the globe, we may, not indeed with the precipitancy of visionary reformers, but in that gradual progress which the nature of the case requires, be the instrument of preparing them for embracing our religion ; and by the measure in which they adopt our improvements in art and science, they may become qualified to receive, through our communication, the knowledge of the true God, and of his son Christ Jesus.

5. Observe, that the objection, implied in some of the questions that I stated, necessarily arises from the employment of human means in that partial propagation of the Gospel which has already taken place. Any such objection might have been effectually obviated by a continued miracle ; but it remains to be inquired whether the nature of the case, or the general analogy of Divine Providence, gives any reason to expect this method of obviating the objection. Had the outstretched arm of the Almighty, which first introduced the Gospel, continued to be exerted through all succeeding ages in the propagation of it, the course of human affairs would have been unhinged, and the argument from miracles would have been

weakened, because the extraordinary interposition of the Almighty would, by reason of its frequent returns, have been confounded with the ordinary course of nature. The divine original of the gift, therefore, being ascertained, the hand of him from whom it had proceeded was wisely withdrawn, and human passions and interests were combined, by his all-ruling Providence, to diffuse it in the measure which he had ordained. The pious zeal of many Christians in early and later times, the vanity, ambition, or avarice, which led others to promote their private ends by spreading the faith of Christ, the wide extent of the Roman empire at the time when Christianity became the established religion of the state, the subsequent dismemberment of the empire by the invasions and settlements of the barbarous nations, and the spirit of commerce which has carried the descendants of these nations to regions never visited by the Roman arms, are some of the instruments employed by the providence of God in the propagation of Christianity. It was not to be expected, that in a propagation thus committed to human means, the heavenly gift would escape all contamination from the imperfect and impure channels through which it was conveyed; and it cannot be denied that there have been many corruptions, many improper methods of converting men to Christianity, and many gross adulterations and perversions of "the faith once delivered to the saints." But you will observe in general, that although the gifts of God are liable to abuse through the imperfections and vices of men, such abuse is never considered as any argument that the gifts did not proceed from him: and with regard to the corruptions of Christianity in particular, you will ob-

serve, that so far from their creating any presumption against the evidence of our religion, there are circumstances which render them an argument for its divine original. They are foretold in the Scriptures. They arose by the neglect of the Scriptures, and they were in a great measure remedied at the Reformation, by the return of a considerable part of the Christian world to that truth which the Scriptures declare. The case stands thus. The Gospel contains a system of faith and practice, which is safely deposited in those authentic records that are received by the whole Christian world. That system was indeed deformed in its progress by the errors and passions of men, but it breaks through this cloud by its own intrinsic light. The striking manner in which the prophecy of the corruptions of Christianity has been fulfilled forms an important branch of the evidence of our religion. The discussions which they occasioned have contributed very much to render the nature of the Gospel more perfectly understood ; and the further that the Christian world departs either from those corruptions to which the Reformation applied a remedy, or from any others which the Scriptures condemn, the divinity of their religion will become the more manifest. Hence you may perceive an advantage arising from the slowness with which the Gospel was propagated for many centuries. In its rapid progress before the destruction of Jerusalem, the pure doctrine of the apostles was carried by themselves, or their immediate successors, through all the parts of the then known world. But had it spread with equal rapidity in the dark ages, all the absurdities which at that time adhered to it would have spread also ; and so universal a disease could hardly

have admitted of any remedy. It is now purified from a great part of the dross. The influence of the Reformation has extended even to Roman Catholic countries ; and in those which are reformed, the progress of knowledge, and the application of sound criticism, are continuing to illustrate the genuine doctrines of Christ. The Gospel will thus be communicated with less adulteration to those parts of the world which are yet to receive the first notice of it : and that free intercourse, which the spirit of modern commerce is now opening between countries which formerly regarded each other with jealousy, may be the mean of extirpating the errors of Popery which were sown in remote regions by the zeal of Roman Catholic missionaries. These are pleasing views, sufficient to overpower the peevish objection suggested by the corruptions of Christianity : they lead us to consider the Almighty as making all things work together for the establishment of truth and righteousness upon earth ; and they teach us to rest with assurance in the declaration of Scripture, that “ all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord.”

6. One part of the objection only remains. It cannot be denied that there is much wickedness in Christian countries, even those which hold the truth in its primitive simplicity. It is not unnatural for a benevolent mind, which wishes the virtue of mankind as the only sure foundation of their happiness, to regret that the Gospel does not produce a more complete reformation of the vices of the world ; and if the most important blessing which a revelation can confer is to turn men from their iniquities, a doubt may sometimes obtrude itself even upon a candid and

devout mind, how far the effect really produced is proportioned to the long preparation, and the mighty works which ushered in the Gospel. The following observations serve to remove this doubt. It is extremely difficult to attain to any precise notion of the sum of wickedness in ancient times ; and there are no data upon which we can form any estimate of what would have been the measure of wickedness in the present circumstances of society, if the Gospel had not appeared. The religion of Jesus has extirpated some horrid practices of ancient times : it has refined the manners of men in war, and in several important articles of domestic intercourse ; and it has produced an extension and activity of beneficence unknown in the heathen world. It imposes restraints upon those evil passions and inordinate desires, which, were it not for its influence, would be indulged by many without control ; and it cherishes in the breasts of individuals those private virtues of humility, patience, and resignation, which do not receive all the honour which is due to them, because their excellence withdraws them from public observation. It addresses itself to every principle of action in the human breast with greater energy than any other system ever did : the tendency of all its parts is to render men virtuous ; and if it fails in reforming the world, we cannot conceive any method of reformation consistent with the character of free agents, that is likely to prove effectual. It is according to this character that God always deals with the children of men. Religion joins its influence to reason. But it is an inconsistency in terms to say that religion should compel men to be virtuous, because compulsion destroys the essence of virtue.

These observations appear to me to be a sufficient answer to the objection against the truth of Christianity, which has been drawn from its appearing to have little influence upon the lives of Christians. But I am sensible that they are not sufficient to counteract the influence of this objection upon the minds of men. The wickedness of those who call themselves Christians is undoubtedly a reproach to our religion. It is a grief to the friends of Christianity, and the most ready sarcasm in the mouths of its enemies. It is your business, the office for which all your studies are meant to prepare you, to diminish the influence of this objection. If you convert a sinner from the error of his ways, or brighten, by your example and your discourse, the graces of the disciples of Christ, you confirm the argument arising from the propagation of our religion. And the best service that you can render to that honourable cause, in support of which you profess to exert your talents, is to exhibit in your own character the genuine spirit of Christianity, and to illustrate the principles of that doctrine which is according to godliness, in such a manner as may render them, through the blessing of God, the means of improving the character of your neighbours.

The amount of the answers which I have suggested may be summed up in a few words. Any objection, arising from the measure of effect produced by the Gospel, cannot overturn direct historical evidence of a divine interposition. We are not warranted, by the course of nature, and the conduct of divine Providence in other matters, to expect either that the Almighty will confer the same religious advantages upon all his creatures, or that he

will accomplish, in a short space of time, that publication of the Gospel which formed part of his original purpose. A considerable measure of religious knowledge was diffused through the world during the preparation for the appearance of the Gospel, and the delay of its universal publication may contribute to prepare the world for receiving it. The corruptions of Christianity, which arose unavoidably from the human means employed in its propagation, could not have been obviated without a continued miracle; and the imperfect degree in which the Gospel has actually reformed the world, however much it may be a matter of regret to Christians, yet, when compared with the excellence and energy of the doctrine, is only a proof that religion was given to improve, but not to destroy, the character of reasonable agents.

Besides the books mentioned in the course of this chapter, you may read two excellent sermons of Bishop Atterbury, on the Miraculous Propagation of the Gospel.

You will derive the most enlarged views upon this, as upon every other subject connected with Christianity, from Butler's Analogy, particularly from Part ii. chap. vi. at the beginning.

Consult also Jortin.

Law's Considerations on the Theory of Religion.

Paley's Evidences, vol. ii.

Hill's Sermons.

Shaw and Dick upon the Counsel of Gamaliel.

Macknight's Truth of the Gospel History; a book that deserves to be better known, and more generally read than it is. All the authorities and arguments, which are concisely stated by other writers, are spread out in that large work with a fulness and clearness of illustration that is very useful, and, in many places, with a degree of acuteness and ingenuity that is not commonly met with. He has dealt very largely upon the argument for the truth of the Christian religion, which arises

from the conversion of the world to Christianity. You will find, in this part of his work, a most complete elucidation of the whole argument—the history of the ten persecutions before Constantine—and a great deal of information with which it is highly proper your minds should be furnished, and which you will not easily gather from any other single treatise.

BOOK II.

GENERAL VIEW OF THE SCRIPTURE SYSTEM.

CHAP. I.

INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE.

I HAVE stated the evidence upon which we receive the books of the New Testament as authentic genuine records; and I have long been employed in examining this high claim which they advance, that they contain a divine revelation. It appeared that this claim was not contradicted by the general contents of the books, but rather that there was a presumption arising from thence in its favour. We found the claim directly supported by miracles received upon clear historical evidence, by the agreement of the new dispensation with a train of prophecies contained in books that are certainly known to have existed many ages before our Saviour was born, by the striking fulfilment of his prophecies, by his resurrection from the dead, by the miraculous powers conferred upon his apostles after his ascension, and by the propagation of his religion.

But, even after this review of the principal evidences of the truth of Christianity, there remains a very interesting question, before we are prepared to enter upon a particular examination of the system of truth revealed in the books of the New Testament. The question is, whether we are to regard these books as inspired writings? It is possible, you will observe, that Christ was a divine messenger, that the persons whom he chose as his companions during his abode upon earth were endowed by him with the power of working miracles; and yet that, in recording the history of his life, and publishing the doctrines of his religion, they were left merely to the exercise of their own recollection and understanding. Upon this supposition, the miracles of our Lord and his apostles may be received as facts established by satisfying historical evidence; and an inference may be drawn from them, that the person who performed such works, and who committed to his disciples powers similar to his own, was a teacher sent from God; and yet the writings of the apostles will be considered as human compositions, distinguished from the works of other men merely by the superior advantages which the authors had derived from the conversation of such a person as Jesus, but in no respect dictated by the spirit of God.

This is the system of the modern Socinians, which their eagerness to get rid of some of the doctrines, that other Christians consider as clearly revealed in Scripture, has led them of late openly to avow. I quote the sentiments of Dr. Priestley from one of his latest publications, the very same in which he bears a strong testimony to the credibility of the resurrection of Jesus. "I think that the Scriptures were

written without any particular inspiration, by men who wrote according to the best of their knowledge, and who, from their circumstances, could not be mistaken with respect to the greater facts of which they were proper witnesses, but (like other men subject to prejudice) might be liable to adopt a hasty and ill-grounded opinion concerning things which did not fall within the compass of their own knowledge, and which had no connexion with any thing that was so." "Setting aside all idea of the inspiration of the writers, I consider Matthew and Luke as simply historians, whose credit must be determined by the circumstances in which they wrote, and the nature of the facts which they relate." And again, when he is speaking of a particular doctrine, in proof of which some passages in the Epistles are generally adduced, Dr. Priestley says, "It is not from a few casual expressions in epistolary writings, which are seldom composed with so much care as books intended for the use of posterity, that we can be authorised to infer that such was the serious opinion of the apostles. But if it had been their real opinion, it would not follow that it was true, unless the teaching of it should appear to be included in their general commission."*

And thus, according to Dr. Priestley, there is no kind of inspiration either in the Gospels or the Epistles. He admits them to be writings of the apostles. But he maintains that the measure of regard due to any narration or assertion contained in these writings is left to be determined by the rules of criticism,

* History of Early Opinions, vol. iv. p. 5, 58 ; vol. i. p. 70.

by human reason judging how far that assertion or narration was included in the commission of the apostles, *i. e.* how far it is essential to the Christian religion. Different persons entertain different apprehensions concerning that which is essential to revelation. And, according to Dr. Priestley's system, every person being at liberty to deny any part of Scripture that appears to him unessential, there is no invariable standard of our religion ; but the Gospel is to every one just what he pleases to make it. Accordingly Dr. Priestley, who sometimes argues very ably for the divine mission of Jesus, by availing himself of that liberty which he derives from denying the inspiration of Scripture, has successively struck out of his creed many of those articles which appear to us fundamental. And you may judge of the length to which his principles lead, when one of his followers, in a publication avowedly under his protection, has written an essay to show that our Lord was not free from sin. Many years before Dr. Priestley's writings appeared, the received notions of the inspiration of the apostles, which had been held by Christians without much examination, were acutely canvassed. Dr. Conyers Middleton, author of the *Life of Cicero*, has done eminent service to the Protestant cause, by exposing the imposture of the Popish miracles, and by tracing, in his *Letter from Rome*, the heathen original of many ceremonies of the church of Rome. But his attachment to Christianity itself is very suspicious, and he is far from being a safe guide in any questions respecting the truth of our holy faith. In some of his miscellaneous tracts, he infers from the dispute between Peter and Paul at

Antioch, * from the variations in the four evangelists, and from other circumstances, that the inspiration of the apostles was only an occasional illapse, communicated to their minds at particular seasons, as the power of working miracles was given them only at those times when they had occasion to exert it; that they were not under the continual direction of an unerring spirit; and that, on ordinary occasions, they were in the condition of ordinary men. Nearly the same opinion was held by the late Gilbert Wakefield, who was a disciple of Priestley, but who does not appear to advance so far as his master. He contends, that a plenary infallible inspiration, attending and controlling the evangelists in every conjuncture, is a doctrine not warranted by Scripture, unnecessary, and injurious to Christianity; although he admits that the illuminating Spirit of God had purified their minds, and enlarged their ideas. The system of Bishop Benson, in his essay concerning inspiration, prefixed to his paraphrase of St. Paul's epistles, is, that the whole scheme of the Gospel was communicated from heaven to the minds of the apostles, was faithfully retained in their memories, and is expounded in their writings by the use of their natural faculties. The loose notions concerning inspiration, entertained by the vulgar and by those who never thought deeply of the subject, go a great deal farther. But it is proper that you should know distinctly what is the measure and kind of inspiration which we are warranted to hold.

In order to establish your minds in the belief that

* Gal. ii.

the Scriptures are given by inspiration of God, it is necessary to begin with observing, that inspiration is not impossible. The Father of Spirits may act upon the minds of his creatures, and this action may extend to any degree which the purposes of divine wisdom require. He may superintend the minds of those who write, so as to prevent the possibility of error in their writings. This is the lowest degree of inspiration. He may enlarge their understandings, and elevate their conceptions beyond the measure of ordinary men. This is a second degree. Or he may suggest to them the thoughts which they shall express, and the words which they shall employ, so as to render them merely the vehicles of conveying his will to others. This is the highest degree of inspiration. No sound theist will deny that all these three degrees are possible ; and it remains to be inquired, what reason we have for thinking that the Almighty did act in any such manner upon the minds of the writers of the New Testament. If they were really inspired, the evidence of the fact will probably ascertain the measure of inspiration which was vouchsafed to them. The evidence consists of the following parts : The inspiration of the apostles was necessary for the purposes of their mission—It was promised by our Lord—It is claimed by themselves—The claim was admitted by their disciples—And it is not contradicted by any circumstance in their writings.

I. Inspiration of the apostles appears to have been necessary for the purposes of their mission ; and, therefore, if we admit that Jesus came from God, and that he sent them forth to make disciples of all

nations, we shall acknowledge that some degree of inspiration is highly probable.

The first light in which the books of the New Testament lead us to consider the apostles is, as the historians of Jesus. After having been his companions during his ministry, they came forth to bear witness of him; and as the benefit of his religion was not to be confined to the age in which he or they lived, they left in the four Gospels a record of what he did and taught. Two of the four were written by the apostles Matthew and John. Mark and Luke, whose names are prefixed to the other two, were probably of the seventy whom our Lord sent out in his lifetime; and we learn from the most ancient Christian historians, that the gospel of Mark was revised by Peter, and the gospel of Luke by Paul; and that both were afterwards approved by John, so that all the four may be considered as transmitted to the church with the sanction of apostolical authority. Now, if you recollect the condition of the apostles, and the nature of their history, you will perceive that, even as historians, they stood in need of some measure of inspiration. Plato might feel himself at liberty to feign many things of his master Socrates, because it mattered little to the world whether the instruction that was conveyed to them proceeded from the one philosopher or from the other. But the servants of a divine teacher, who appeared as his witnesses, and professed to be the historians of his life, were bound by their office to give a true record. And their history was an imposition upon the world; if they did not declare exactly and literally what they had seen and heard.

This was an office which required not only a love of the truth, but a memory more retentive and more accurate than it was possible for persons of the character and education of the apostles to possess. To relate, at the distance of twenty years, long moral discourses, which were not originally written, and which were not attended with any striking circumstances that might imprint them upon the mind; to preserve a variety of parables, the beauty and significance of which depended upon particular expressions; to record long and minute prophecies, where the alteration of a single phrase might have produced an inconsistency between the event and the prediction; and to give a particular detail of the intercourse which Jesus had with his friends and with his enemies: all this is a work so very much above the capacity of unlearned men, that, had they attempted to execute it by their own natural powers, they must have fallen into such absurdities and contradictions as would have betrayed them to every discerning eye. It was therefore highly expedient, and even necessary for the faith of future ages, that besides those opportunities of information which the apostles enjoyed, and that tried integrity which they possessed, their understanding and their memory should be assisted by a supernatural influence, which might prevent them from mistaking the meaning of what they had heard, which might restrain them from putting into the mouth of Jesus any words which he did not utter, or from omitting what was important, and which might thus give us perfect security, that the Gospels are as faithful a copy, as if Jesus himself had left in writing those sayings and

those actions which he wished posterity to remember.

But we consider the apostles in the lowest view, when we speak of them as barely the historians of their Master. In their epistles they assume a higher character, which renders inspiration still more necessary. All the benefit, which they derived from the public and the private instructions of Jesus before his death, had not so far opened their minds as to qualify them for receiving the whole counsel of God. And he, who knows what is in man, declares to them the night on which he was betrayed, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now." * The purpose of many of his parables, the full meaning even of some of his plain discourses, had not been attained by them. They had marvelled when he spake to them of earthly things. But many heavenly things of his kingdom had not been told them : and they, who were destined to carry his religion to the ends of the earth, themselves needed, at the time of their receiving this commission, that some one should instruct them in the doctrine of Christ. It is true that, after his resurrection, Jesus opened their understandings, and explained to them the scriptures, and he continued upon earth forty days, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. It appears, however, from the history which they have recorded in the book of Acts, that some further teaching was necessary for them. † Immediately before our Lord ascended, their minds being still full of the expectation of a temporal kingdom, they

* John xv. 12.

† Acts ch. i.

say unto him, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? It was not till some time after they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, that they understood that the gospel had taken away the obligation to observe the ceremonies of the Mosaic law: and the action of Peter in baptizing Cornelius, a devout heathen, gave offence to some of the apostles and brethren in Judea when they first heard it.* Yet in their epistles, we find just notions of the spiritual nature of the religion of Jesus as a kingdom of righteousness, the faithful subjects of which are to receive remission of sins, and sanctification through his blood, and just notions of the extent of this religion as a dispensation, the spiritual blessings of which are to be communicated to all in every land who receive it in faith and love. These notions appear to us to be the explication both of the ancient predictions, and of many particular expressions that occur in the discourses of our Lord. But it is manifest that they had not been acquired by the apostles during the teaching of Jesus. They are so adverse to every thing which men educated in Jewish prejudices had learned, and had hoped, that they could not be the fruit of their own reflections; and, therefore, they imply the teaching of that Spirit who gradually impressed them upon the mind, guiding the apostles gently, as they were able to follow him, into all the truth connected with the salvation of mankind. As inspiration was necessary to give the minds of the apostles possession of the system that is unfolded in their epistles, so many parts of that system are removed at such a distance from human

* Acts ch. xi.

discoveries, and are liable to such misapprehension, that unless we suppose a continued superintendence of the Spirit by whom it was taught, succeeding ages would not have a sufficient security that those, who were employed to deliver it, had not been guilty of gross mistakes in some most important doctrines.

Inspiration will appear still further necessary, when you recollect that the writings of the apostles contain several predictions of things to come. Paul foretells, in his epistles, the corruptions of the Church of Rome, and many other circumstances which have taken place in the history of the Christian Church: and the Revelation is a book of prophecy, of which part has been already fulfilled, while the rest, we trust, will be explained by the events which are to arise in the course of Providence. But prophecy is a kind of writing which implies the highest degree of inspiration. When predictions, like those in Scripture, are particular and complicated, and the events are so remote and so contingent as to be out of the reach of human sagacity, it is plain that the writers of the predictions do not speak according to the measure of information which they had acquired by natural means, but are merely the instruments through which the Almighty communicates, in such measure and such language as he thinks fit, that knowledge of futurity which is denied to man. And although the full meaning of their own predictions was not understood by themselves, they will be acknowledged to be true prophets, when the fulfilment comes to reflect light upon that language, which, for wise purposes, was made dark at the time of its being put into their mouth.

Thus the nature of the writings of the apostles suggests the necessity of their having been inspired. They could not be accurate historians of the life of Jesus without one degree of inspiration; nor safe expounders of his doctrine without a higher; nor prophets of distant events without the highest. As all the three degrees are equally possible to God, it is natural to presume, from the end for which the apostles were sent, that the degree which was suited to every part of their writings was not withheld; and we find the promise of Jesus perfectly agreeable to this presumption.

II. Inspiration of the apostles was promised by our Lord. It is not unfair reasoning to adduce promises contained in the Scriptures themselves, as proofs of their divine inspiration. It were, indeed, reasoning in a circle, to bring the testimony of the Scriptures in proof of the divine mission of Jesus. But that being established by the evidence which has been stated, and the books of the New Testament having been proved to be the authentic genuine records of the persons whose names they bear, we are warranted to argue from the declarations contained in them, what is the measure of inspiration which Jesus was pleased to bestow upon his servants. He might have been a divine teacher, and they might have been his apostles, although he had bestowed none at all. But his character gives us security that they possessed all that he promised. We read in the Gospels, that Jesus “ordained twelve that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.”* And as this

* Mark iii. 14.

was the purpose for which they were first called, so it was the charge left them at his departure—"Go," said he, "preach the gospel to every creature; make disciples of all nations."* His constant familiar intercourse with them was intended to qualify them for the execution of this charge; and the promises made to them have a special reference to the office in which they were to be employed. When he sent them during his life to preach in the cities of Israel, he said, "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."† And when he spake to them in his prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, of the persecutions which they were to endure after his death, he repeats the same promise: "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist."‡ It is admitted that the words in both these passages refer properly to that assistance, which the inexperience of the apostles was to derive from the suggestions of the Spirit, when they should be called to defend their conduct and their cause before the tribunals of the magistrates. But the fulfilment of this promise was a pledge, both to the apostles and to the world, that the measure of inspiration necessary for the more important purpose implied in their commission would not be withheld; and accordingly, when that

* Mark xvi. 16; Matt. xxviii. 19. See original.

† Matt. x. 19, 20. See original.

‡ Luke xxi. 15.

purpose came to be unfolded to the apostles, the promise of the assistance of the Spirit was expressed in a manner which applies it to the extent of their commission. In the long affectionate discourse recorded by John, when our Lord took a solemn farewell of the disciples, after eating the last passover with them, he said, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. But ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come."* Here are all the degrees of inspiration which we found to be necessary for the apostles: the Spirit was to bring to their remembrance what they had heard—to guide them into the truth, which they were not then able to bear—and to show them things to come; and all this they were to derive, not from occasional illapses, but from the perpetual inhabitation of the Spirit. That this inspiration was vouchsafed to them, not for their own sakes, but in order to qualify them for the successful discharge of their office as the messengers of

* John xiv. 16, 17, 26; xvi. 12, 13. See original.

Christ, and the instructors of mankind, appears from several expressions of that prayer which immediately follows the discourse containing the promise of inspiration ; particularly from these words, “ Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word ; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee ; that they may be one in us ; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”* In conformity to this prayer, so becoming him who was not merely the friend of the apostles, but the light of the world, is that charge which he gives them immediately before his ascension, “ Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,”—the conclusion of the age that has been introduced by my appearance. I am with you alway, not by my bodily presence, for immediately after he was taken out of their sight, but I am with you by the Holy Ghost, which I am to send upon you not many days hence, and which is to abide with you for ever.†

The promise of Jesus then implies, according to the plain construction of the words, that the apostles, in executing their commission, were not to be left wholly to their natural powers, but were to be assisted by that illumination and direction of the Spirit which the nature of the commission required ; and you may learn the sense which our Lord had of

* John xvii. 20, 21. † Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. See original.

the importance and effect of this promise from one circumstance, that he never makes any distinction between his own words and those of his apostles, but places the doctrines and commandments which they were to deliver upon a footing with those which he had spoken: "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."* These words plainly imply, that Christians have no warrant to pay less regard to any thing contained in the Epistles than to that which is contained in the Gospels; and teach us, that every doctrine and precept clearly delivered by the apostles, comes to the Christian world with the same stamp of divine authority as the words of Jesus, who spake in the name of him that sent him.

The author of our religion, having thus made the faith of the Christian world to hang upon the teaching of the apostles, gave the most signal manifestation of the fulfilment of that promise which was to qualify them for their office, by the miraculous gifts with which they were endowed on the day of Pentecost, and by the abundance of those gifts which the imposition of their hands was to diffuse through the church. One of the twelve indeed, whose labours in preaching the Gospel were the most abundant and the most extensive, was not present at this manifestation, for Paul was not called to be an apostle till after the day of Pentecost. But it is very remarkable, that the manner of his being called was expressly calculated to supply this deficiency. As he journeyed to Damascus, about noon, to bring the

* Luke x. 16.

Christians who were there bound to Jerusalem, there shone from heaven a great light round about him. And he heard a voice, saying, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. And I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; and now I send thee to the Gentiles to open their eyes.* In reference to this manner of his being called, Paul generally inscribes his epistles with these words: Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will or by the commandment of God; and he explains very fully what he meant by the use of this expression, in the beginning of his epistle to the Galatians, where he gives an account of his conversion. "Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. I neither received the Gospel of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went unto Arabia."† All that we said of the necessity of inspiration, and of the import of the promise which Jesus made to the other apostles, receives very great confirmation from this history of Paul, who, being called to be an apostle after the ascension of Jesus, received the Gospel by immediate revelation from heaven, and

* Acts xxvi. 12—18.

† Gal. i. 1, 12, 15, 16, 17.

was thus put upon a footing with the rest, both as to his designation, which did not proceed from the choice of man, and as to his qualifications, which were imparted not by human instruction, but by the teaching of the author of Christianity. The Lord Jesus, who appeared to him, might furnish Paul with the same advantages which the other apostles had derived from his presence on earth, and might give him the same assurance of the inhabitation of the Spirit that the promises, which we have been considering, had imparted to those.

III. Inspiration was claimed by the apostles, and their claim may be considered as the interpretation of the promise of their Master.

You will not find the claim to inspiration formally advanced in the Gospels. This omission has sometimes been stated by those superficial critics whose prejudices serve to account for their haste, as an objection against the existence of inspiration. But if you attend to the reason of the omission, you will perceive that it is only an instance of that delicate propriety which pervades all the New Testament. The Gospels are the record of the great facts which vouch the truth of Christianity. These facts are to be received upon the testimony of men who had been eye-witnesses of them. The foundation of Christian faith being laid in an assent to these facts, it would have been preposterous to have introduced in support of them, that superintendence of the Spirit which preserved the minds of the apostles from error. For there can be no proof of the inspiration of the apostles, unless the truth of the facts be previously admitted. The apostles, therefore,

bring forward the evidence of Christianity in its natural order, when they speak in the Gospels as the companions and eye-witnesses of Jesus, claiming that credit which is due to honest men who had the best opportunities of knowing what they declared. This is the language of John.* “Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples. But these are written that ye may believe, and this is the disciple which testifieth these things.” The evangelist Luke appears to speak differently in the introduction to his Gospel;† and opposite opinions have been entertained respecting the information conveyed by that introduction.

There is a difference of opinion, first, with regard to the time when Luke wrote his Gospel. It appears to some to be expressly intimated that he wrote after Matthew and Mark, because he speaks of other Gospels then in circulation; and it is generally understood that John wrote his after the other three. But the manner in which Luke speaks of these other Gospels does not seem to apply to those of Matthew and Mark. He calls them many, which implies that they were more than two, and which would confound these two canonical Gospels with imperfect accounts of our Lord's life, which we know from ancient writers were early circulated, but were rejected after the four Gospels were published. It is hardly conceivable that Luke would have alluded to the two Gospels of Matthew and Mark without distinguishing them from other very inferior productions; and therefore it is probable, that when he used this mode of expression, no ac-

* John xx. 30, 31, and xxi. 24.

† Luke i. 1—4.

counts of our Lord's life were then in existence but those inferior productions. There appears also to very sound critics to be internal evidence that Luke wrote first. He is much more particular than the other evangelists in his report of our Lord's birth, and of the meetings with his apostles after his resurrection. They might think it unnecessary to introduce the same particulars into their Gospels after Luke. But if they wrote before him, the want of these particulars gives to their Gospels an appearance of imperfection which we cannot easily explain.

The other point suggested by this introduction, upon which there has been a difference of opinion, is, whether Luke, who was not an apostle, wrote his Gospel from personal knowledge, attained by his being a companion of Jesus, or from the information of others. Our translation certainly favours the last opinion; and it is the more general opinion, defended by very able critics. Dr. Randolph, in the first volume of his works, which contains a history of our Saviour's life, supports the first opinion, and suggests a punctuation of the verses, and an interpretation of one word, according to which that opinion may be defended. Read the second and third verses in connexion. Καὼς παρεδσαν ἡμιν οἱ ἀπ' αρχης αυτοπται και ὑπηρεται γενομενοι του λογου Εδοξε καμοι, παρηκολουθηκοτι ανωθεν πασιν ακριβως καθεξης σοι γραψαι, κραιτιστε Θεοφιλε. By ἡμιν is understood the Christian world, who had received information, both oral and written, from those that had been αυτοπται και ὑπηρεται. Καμοι means Luke, who proposed to follow the example of those αυτοπται in writing what he knew; and he describes his own knowledge by the word παρηκολουθηκοτι, which is more

precise than the circumlocution, by which it is translated, "having had perfect understanding of all things." Perfect understanding may be derived from various sources; but παρακολουθεω properly means, I go along with as a companion, and derive knowledge from my own observation. And, it is remarkable, that the word is used in this very sense by the Jewish historian Josephus, who published his history not many years after Luke wrote, and who in his introduction represents himself as worthy of credit, because he had not merely inquired of those who knew, but παρακολουθηκοτα τοις γεγονοσιν, which he explains by this expression, πολλων μεν αυτουργος πραξεων, πλειστων δ' αυτοπτης γενομενος. If this interpretation is not approved of, then, according to the sense of those verses which is most commonly adopted, Luke will be understood to give in the second verse, an account of that ground upon which the knowledge of the Christian world with regard to these things rested, the reports of the αυτοπται και υπηρξει; and to state in the third verse, that he, having collected and collated these reports, and employed the most careful and minute investigation, had resolved to write an account of the life of Jesus. Here he does not claim inspiration: he does not even say that he was an eye-witness. But he says that, having like others heard the report of eye-witnesses, he had accurately examined the truth of what they said, and presented to the Christian world the fruit of his researches.

The foundation is still the same as in John's gospel, the report of those in whose presence Jesus did and said what is recorded. To this report are added, 1. The investigation of Luke, a contemporary of the apostles, the companion of Paul in a great part of

his journeyings, and honoured by him with this title, "Luke the beloved physician."* 2. The approbation of Paul, who is said by the earliest Christian writers to have revised this gospel, written by his companion, so that it came abroad with apostolical authority. 3. The universal consent of the Christian church, which, although jealous of the books that were then published, and rejecting many that claimed the sanction of the apostles, has uniformly, from the earliest times, put the Gospel of Luke upon a footing with those of Matthew and Mark; a clear demonstration that they who had access to the best information knew that it had been revised by an apostle.

As then the authors of the Gospels appear under the character of eye-witnesses, attesting what they had seen, there would have been an impropriety in their resting the evidence of the essential facts of Christianity upon inspiration. But after the respect which their character and their conduct procured to their testimony, and the visible confirmation which it received from heaven, had established the faith of a part of the world, a belief of their inspiration became necessary. They might have been credible witnesses of facts, although they had not been distinguished from other men. But they were not qualified to execute the office of apostles without being inspired. And therefore, as soon as the circumstances of the church required the execution of that office, the claim which had been conveyed to them by the promise of their Master, and which is implied in the apostolical character, appears in their

* Coloss. iv. 14.

writings. They instantly exercised the authority derived to them from Jesus, by planting ministers in the cities where they had preached the gospel, by setting every thing pertaining to these Christian societies in order, by controlling the exercise of those miraculous gifts which they had imparted, and by correcting the abuses which happened even in their time. But they demanded, from all who had received the faith of Christ, submission to the doctrines and commandments of his apostles, as the inspired messengers of heaven. "But God hath revealed it," not *them*, as our translators have supplied the accusative, revealed the wisdom of God, the dispensation of the Gospel "unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given us of God; which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth."* "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord:" *i. e.* Let no eminence of spiritual gifts be set up in opposition to the authority of the apostles, or as implying any dispensation from submitting to it.† "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."‡ Peter speaking of the epistles of

* 1 Cor. ii. 10, 12, 13.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

‡ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

Paul, says, “ Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you.” * And John makes the same claim of inspiration for the other apostles, as well as for himself. “ We are of God : he that knoweth God, heareth us ; he that is not of God, heareth not us.” †

The claim to inspiration is clearly made by the apostles in those passages, where they place their own writings upon the same footing with the books of the Old Testament ; for Paul, speaking of the *ιερα γραμματα*, a common expression among the Jews for their scriptures, in which Timothy had been instructed from his childhood, says, “ All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” ‡ Peter speaking of the ancient prophets, says, “ The Spirit of Christ was in them ;” and “ The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man ; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” § And the quotations of our Lord and his apostles from the books of the Old Testament are often introduced with an expression in which their inspiration is directly asserted. “ Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias ;” “ By the mouth of thy servant David thou hast said,” || &c. &c.

With this uniform testimony to that inspiration of the Jewish scriptures, which was universally believed among that people, you are to conjoin this circumstance, that Paul and Peter in different places rank their own writings with the books of the Old Testament. Paul commands that his epistles should

* 2 Pet. iii. 15.

† 1 John iv. 6.

‡ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

§ 1 Pet. i. 11. 2 Pet. i. 21.

|| Acts i. 16. iv. 25. xxviii. 25.

be read in the churches, where none but those books which the Jews believed to be inspired were ever read.* He says that Christians “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets;” ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν,† a conjunction which would have been highly improper, if the former had not been inspired as well as the latter: and Peter charges the Christians, to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles.”‡ The nature of the book of Revelation led the apostle John to assert most directly his personal inspiration; for he says that “Jesus sent and signified by his angel to his servant John the things that were to come to pass;” and that the divine person, like the Son of Man, who appeared to him when he was in the spirit, commanded him to write in a book what he saw: and in one of the visions recorded in that book, Rev. xxi. 14, when the dispensation of the gospel was presented to John under the figure of a great city, the new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven, there is one part of the image that is a beautiful expression of that authority in settling the form of the Christian church, and in teaching articles of faith, which the apostles derived from their inspiration: “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” §

These are only a few of the many passages to the same purpose which will occur to you in reading the New Testament: but it is manifest even from them,

* Col. iv. 16.

† Ephes. ii. 20.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 2.

§ Rev. i. 1, 10—19; xxi. 14.

that the manner in which the apostles speak of their own writings is calculated to mislead every candid reader, unless they really wrote under the direction of the Spirit of God. So gross and daring an imposture is absolutely inconsistent not only with their whole character, but also with those gifts of the Holy Ghost, of which there is unquestionable evidence that they were possessed ; and which, being the natural vouchers of the assertion made by them concerning their own writings, cannot be supposed, upon the principles of sound theism, to have been imparted for a long course of years to persons who continued during all that time asserting such a falsehood, and appealing to those gifts for the truth of what they said.

IV. The claim of the apostles derives much confirmation from the reception which it met with amongst the Christians of their days. It appears from an expression of Peter, that at the time when he wrote his second epistle, the epistles of Paul were classed with the other scriptures, the books of the Old Testament ; *i. e.* were accounted inspired writings.* It is well known to those who are versant in the early history of the church, with what care the first Christians discriminated between the apostolical writings, and the compositions of other authors, however much distinguished by their piety, and with what reverence they received those books which were known by their inscription, by the place from which they proceeded, or the manner in which they were circulated, to be the work of an apostle. In Lardner's Credibility of the Gospel History you will

* 2 Peter iii. 16.

find the most particular information upon this subject ; and you will perceive that the whole history of the supposititious writings, which appeared in early times, conspires in attesting the veneration in which the authority of the apostles was held by the Christian church. We learn from Justin Martyr that, before the middle of the second century, *τα απομνημονευματα των Αποστόλων και τα συγγραμματα των προφητών* were read together in the Christian assemblies : we know that, from the earliest times, the church has submitted to the writings of the apostles as the infallible standard of faith and practice ; and we find the ground of this peculiar respect expressed by the first Christian writers as well as by their successors, who speak of the writings of the apostles as *Θεϊαι γραφαι, εἰς επιτιμοιαν ἁγίου πνεύματος*.*

V. The only point that remains to be considered is, whether there be any thing in the books themselves inconsistent with the notion of their being inspired. It is impossible for me to follow the detail into which this point runs. But I may suggest the general heads of answer to the multiplicity of objections which fall under it. Even those who acknowledge the excellence of the general system contained in the New Testament, who admit that it must have been revealed to the authors of the books by the Spirit of God, and that there are some instances in which the clearness of the predictions, and even the majesty of the style imply a peculiar illumination and direction of their minds, even such persons meet, in reading the New Testament, with difficulties which they are unable to reconcile with

* Lardner's Cred. vol. i. p. 273 ; vol. iii. p. 230.

the notion of inspiration ; and if they are stumbled, others, who wish to discredit the truth of Christianity, represent the notion of inspiration as rendered wholly indefensible, and even ridiculous, by the mistakes in small matters, the contradictions, the varieties, and littlenesses that occur in several places, and the numberless instances of a style very far removed from that which the Almighty might be conceived to assume.

When you come to examine these objections, there are two general remarks which it will be of great importance for you to carry in your minds.

1. Recollect that the objectors upon such a subject have great advantage. It is very easy to start difficulties and objections. And when the solution is to be derived from an examination of the context, and from a knowledge of ancient languages and customs, the difficulty or objection may be urged in so specious or lively a manner as to make a deep impression, before the solution can be brought forward. But the diligence, the learning, and sagacity of modern commentators have furnished every student, who wishes the scriptures to be true, with satisfying answers to the most formidable objections against particular parts of them ; and it is a general rule which you ought to observe in your study of the scriptures, never to suppose, never to allow the most positive affirmation or the most pointed ridicule to persuade you, that a passage is indefensible, because that measure of information respecting antiquity and of experience in sacred criticism which you possess, does not suggest the manner in which it can be defended. You will find, upon inquiry, that apparent contradictions in the narration of the Gospels, or in

the doctrine of the epistles, may be easily reconciled ; that expressions which have been represented as mean, are justified by the practice of classical writers ; that the harsh sense, which single phrases seem to contain, is removed either by a more accurate translation of the original, or by the connexion in which they stand ; that supposed errors in chronology or geography either disappear upon being closely examined, or arise from some of those trifling variations in the copies of the New Testament which modern criticism has investigated ; that those parts of the conduct of Peter and Paul which have been censured are in no respect inconsistent with the general doctrine which they taught ; and, upon the whole, that as the general matter of the New Testament could not have been known to any who were not inspired of God, and as the manner in which that matter is delivered appears, the more it is considered, to be the more fit and excellent, so there is nothing throughout all the books unworthy of that measure of inspiration of which we have hitherto spoken.

2. Observe that the objections which have been urged against particular passages of the New Testament are in general of no weight in overturning the doctrine of inspiration, unless you suppose that the authors wrote continually under the influence of what has been called the inspiration of suggestion, *i. e.* that every thought was put into their mind, and every word dictated to them by the Spirit of God. But this opinion, which is probably entertained by many well-meaning Christians, and which has been held by some able defenders of Christianity, is now generally abandoned by those who examine

the subject with due care. And the following reasons will satisfy you that it has not been lightly abandoned. It is unnecessary to suppose that this highest degree of inspiration is extended through all the parts of the New Testament, because there are many facts in the Gospels, which the apostles might know perfectly from their own observation or recollection, many expressions which would naturally occur to them, many directions and salutations in their epistles, such as were to be expected in that correspondence. It is not only unnecessary to suppose that the highest degree of inspiration was extended through all the parts of the New Testament, but the supposition is really inconsistent with many circumstances that occur there. I shall mention a few. Paul in some instances makes a distinction between the counsels which he gives in matters of indifference, upon his own judgment, and the commandments which he delivers with the authority of an apostle: "I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." "This I command, yet not I, but the Lord:" a distinction for which there could have been no room, had every word been dictated by the Spirit of God.* Paul sometimes discovers a doubt, and a change of purpose as to the time of his journeyings, and other little incidents, which the highest degree of inspiration would have prevented.† It is allowed that there is a degree of imperfection and obscurity, which, in some instances, remains on the style of the sacred writers, and particularly of Paul, which we cannot easily reconcile with the highest

* 1 Cor. vii. 6, 10.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 3—6, 10, 11.

degree of inspiration.* Once more, there are peculiarities of expression, and a marked manner, by which a person of taste and discernment may clearly distinguish the writings of every one, from those of every other. But had all written uniformly under the same inspiration of suggestion, there could not have been a difference of manner corresponding to the difference of character ; and the expression used by all might have been expected to be the best possible.

These circumstances lead us to abandon the notion that the apostles wrote under a continual inspiration of suggestion. But they are not in the least inconsistent with that kind of inspiration which we found to be necessary for the purposes of their mission ; which is commonly called an inspiration of direction, and which consists in this, that the writers of the New Testament, although allowed to exercise their own memory and understanding, as far as they could be of use ; although allowed to employ their own modes of thinking and expression, as far as there was no impropriety in their being employed, were, by the superintendence of the Spirit, effectually guarded from error while they were writing, and were at all times furnished with that measure of inspiration which the nature of the subject required. In his history every evangelist brings forward those discourses and facts which had made the deepest impression upon his mind ; but while, from the variety which thus naturally takes place in the histories, there arises the strongest proof that there was no collusion, the recollection of every historian

* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

was so far assisted, that he gives us no false information ; and by laying together the several accounts, we may attain as complete a view of the transactions recorded as the Spirit of God judged to be necessary. In the book of Acts we see the mind of the apostles gradually led, by the teaching of the Spirit, to a full apprehension of the whole counsel of God. In the Epistles they apply the knowledge which had thus been imparted to them by revelation, in ministering to the edification, the comfort, or reproof of the churches which they had established ; and the Spirit, who had by this time guided them into all truth, abode with them, so that from the words and commandments of the apostles we may learn the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

It hath pleased God that the Christian world should derive those treasures of divine knowledge which resided in the apostles, not by formal systematical discourses composed for the instruction of future ages, but by the short familiar incidental mention of the Christian doctrines in their epistles. This form of the doctrinal writings of the apostles has been stated as an objection to their being inspired ; but by a little attention you will perceive the great advantages of their being permitted to adopt this form. Our industry is thus quickened in searching the Scriptures. The doctrines are rendered more level to the capacity of the great body of Christians, and more easily recalled to their minds by this mode of being delivered : and the books containing the doctrines are thus made to bring along with them internal marks of authenticity, which could not have belonged to them had they been in

another form.* The inscription of the epistle is a sure voucher, transmitted from the earliest times, that a letter had truly been sent by an apostle of Christ to a church. The character of the apostle is marked in his epistle, and the many little circumstances, which his situation or that of the church introduces into an affectionate letter, while they exhibit the natural expressions of Christian benevolence, bring a conviction, more satisfying than that which arises from any testimony, that the apostles of Jesus proceeded, in execution of the charge given them by their Master, to make disciples of all nations.

In the prophecies which the New Testament contains there must have been the inspiration of suggestion. Neither the words nor the thoughts could there come by the will of man; and the writers spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Accordingly Paul introduces his predictions with these words: The Spirit speaketh expressly; and John, we found, says in the book of Revelation, that he was commanded to write what he saw and heard.

I have explained under this second remark that kind of inspiration, which the different branches of the evidence that has been stated appears to me clearly to establish, and which is now generally considered as all that was necessary for the purposes of the apostolical office. We do not say that every thought was put into the mind of the apostles, and every word dictated to their pen by the Spirit of God. But we say, that by the superintendence

* Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

of the Spirit, they were at all times guarded from error, and were furnished upon every occasion with the measure of inspiration which the nature of the subject required. Upon this view of the matter, we can easily account for all the circumstances that are commonly urged as objections against the notion of inspiration. We may even admit that the apostles were liable to err in their conduct, and were left ignorant of some things which they wished to know : and at the same time we have all that security against misrepresentations of fact, or error in doctrine, which the nature of the commission given to the apostles and the importance of the truths declared by them render necessary for our faith. By this kind of inspiration, while a provision is made for the introduction of those internal marks of authenticity by which the Bible is distinguished above every other book in the world, there is also a perfect fulfilment of the promise given to the apostles by Jesus, a justification of the claim which their writings contain, and a rational account of that entire submission which the Christian church in every age has yielded to the authority of the apostles.

Here then is the ground upon which I rest my foot, and the point from which I desire to be considered as setting out in my Lectures upon Divinity. Jesus was a teacher sent from God. His apostles, who were commanded by him to publish his doctrine to the world, received, in fulfilment of his promise, such a measure of the visible gifts of the Spirit as attested their commission, and such a measure of internal illumination and direction, as render their writings the infallible standard of Christian truth. From hence it follows, that every thing which is

clearly contained in the Gospels and epistles, or which may be fairly deduced from the words there used, is true ; and that every thing which cannot be so proved is no part of the doctrine that Christians are required to believe. After we have attained this point, sound criticism becomes the foundation of Theology. My business is not to frame a system of Divinity, but to delineate that system which the Scriptures teach, by a clear exposition of the passages in which it is taught ; and to defend it, by rescuing the Scriptures from misinterpretation. We shall be very much assisted in this course by our knowledge of the Greek language. The Greek Testament will be our constant companion ; and the best preparation for what you are to learn from me is to apply the knowledge, which you have acquired elsewhere, in rendering the Greek Testament familiar to your minds.

The doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture is touched upon in all the complete defences of Christianity ; of most of which you have both an Index and an Abridgment in Leland's view of the Deistical Writers.

Bishop Burnet has treated it shortly in his Exposition of the 6th Article of the Church of England.

There are many excellent Sermons of English Divines upon this subject. I mention particularly Archbishop Secker's, in the third volume of his works.

And there is a rational, masterly Essay upon this subject, in Bishop Benson's Paraphrase on the Epistles of Paul.

Potter's *Praelectiones Theologicae in Opera Theologica*, tom. iii.

Le Clerc's Letters on Inspiration, with Lowth's Answer.

Randolph's Works.

Wakefield on Inspiration.

Middleton.

Prettyman's Elements of Christian Theology.

Watson's Apology for the Bible and for Christianity.

Preliminary Essays prefixed to Dr. Macknight's new translation
of the Epistles.

Dick on the Inspiration of Scripture.

Jones's Canon of Scripture.

Doddridge.

Paley.

Marsh's Michaelis.

CHAP. II.

PECULIAR DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY.

HAVING established the divine inspiration of the books of the New Testament, we have next to learn from this infallible guide that system of doctrine which characterizes the Christian religion. It is presumptuous and childish to busy ourselves in fancying what that system ought to be. If the books containing the Gospel of Christ were really written by men under the direction of the Spirit of God, they will teach us the truth without mixture of error; and all our speculations vanish before the authoritative declarations which they bring.

I need not occupy time with delineating the great truths of natural religion. These must be the same in every true system, because they are unchangeable; and it occurred formerly, in stating the evidences of Christianity, that this revelation carries along with it one strong presumption of its divine original, by giving in the simplest language, and the plainest form, views of the nature of God, and of the duty of man, more clear, more consistent, and more exalted than are to be found in any other writings. If you

were to throw out of the Scriptures all the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, there would remain a complete system of natural religion, in comparison with which, even the speculations of the enlightened and virtuous sage of Athens appear low and partial. But it is of these peculiar doctrines that Christian theology consists ; and I mean at present to prepare for examining them particularly, by stating them in a short connected view. I cannot propose to meet in this view the sentiments of all the different sects of Christians ; for if I were to attempt to accommodate the sketch that is to be given, to the peculiar tenets of some sects, I should be obliged to leave out several doctrines which appear to me most essential to Christianity. But although I cannot meet the sentiments of opposite sects, I do not wish to derive this short system from the discriminating tenets, or the peculiar language of any one sect : I wish to avoid the use of any terms that are not scriptural, and to present to you the form of sound words which is taught by the apostles themselves. We shall have enough of controverted opinions when we come to attend to the different facts of the system. But it seems to me proper that you should carry in your minds a general distinct conception of the subjects upon which the controversies turn, before we be entangled in that thorny path.

The foundation of the Gospel is this, that men are sinners. If you take away this proposition, the whole system is left without meaning : if you receive it in its full import, you perceive the use of the different parts, and the harmony with which they unite in producing the effect that is ascribed to the whole. The proposition is often enunciated in

Scripture; but the truth of it is independent of the authority of any revelation, and must be admitted by every candid observer, whether he believes or rejects the divine mission of Jesus. Although different states of society have exhibited different forms of wickedness, authentic history does not record any in which human virtue has appeared pure. A great part of the business of every government is to interpose restraints upon the evil passions of the subjects: yet so ineffectual are those restraints, that the peace of the best constituted society is often disturbed by enormous crimes, while there are transgressions of virtue which elude the law, that indicate a deeper depravity of mind than those enormities which are punished; and even the best of the sons of men, those who by the innocence of their lives are exempted not only from the punishments, but even from the censures of human society, have the consciousness of imperfection, of failing, and demerit.

The Scriptures connect this abounding of iniquity with a transaction which took place soon after the creation of Adam. "By one man," says Paul, "sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:—By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation: in Adam all die."* This is the commentary made by an apostle upon the third chapter of Genesis; and when we take that chapter, the commentary of Paul, and other incidental expressions in connexion, we are led by the Scriptures to consider the transgression of the first parents of the human race as altering the condition of their

* Rom. v. 12, 18. 1 Cor. xv. 22.

posterity, rendering this earth a less comfortable, and less virtuous habitation, than without that transgression it would have been, and introducing sin, with all its attendant misery, amongst a part of the rational creation who were made at first after the image of God.

Something analogous to this effect of the transgression of our first parents, may often be observed in human connections. And we are guarded against wantonly rejecting the Scripture account of this early transaction, as incredible or inconsistent with the government of God, when we see, in numberless instances, the sins of some persons extending their baleful influence to the minds and the fortunes of others, a father corrupting the manners of his children, entailing upon them disease, disgrace, poverty and vice, and thus reducing them by his wickedness to a calamitous state, which, had they sprung from other parents, it appears to us they might have avoided.

To this it must be added, that in the present condition of the human race there are many symptoms of degradation. The combat between the higher and the lower parts of our nature, the temptations to vice which every thing around us presents, the judgments which are often executed by changes upon the face of nature, that abridgment of the comforts of life which arises from our own faults, or those of others, and the violence which is done to our feelings and our affections by the manner in which we are called out of the world ; all this, and much more of the same kind, indicates a disordered state, and accords with the slight incidental openings which the Scriptures give us into that ancient transaction, to

which they trace the sin and misery of mankind. The effects of this transaction continued in the world notwithstanding all the efforts of philosophy, good government, and civilization. Neither the vigilant education and rigorous discipline prescribed in some ancient states, nor the circumspection and mortification learned in some ancient schools, were able to cleanse the heart of any one individual from every kind of defilement, or to maintain a life, in all respects blameless. And, whatever remedy the progress of improvement may be conceived to have applied to the other evils which proceed from sin, there is one standing memorial of its power, which defies the wit and the strength of man. None can deliver his own soul, or the soul of his brother from death. "It is appointed unto *all* men once to die." * But death is represented in the Scriptures as the fruit of sin; and therefore the continuance of death is one of those practical lessons which the Almighty often administers, which is independent of speculation, but, being by its nature a strong confirmation of the discoveries that are made, is sufficient to teach all who receive the Scriptures, that the transaction to which they ascribe the introduction of death, has not exhausted all its force.

The Gospel then proceeds upon a fact, which was not created by the revelation, but would have been true, although the Gospel had not appeared, that that part of the reasonable offspring of God who inhabit this earth are sinners, and that their efforts to extricate themselves out of this condition had proved ineffectual. But sin is repugnant to our moral

* Heb. ix 27.

feelings, and excites our abhorrence. How much more odious must it appear in the sight of Him, whom natural religion and the declarations of Scripture teach us to consider as infinitely holy ! We see only a small portion of human wickedness. But all the demerit of every individual sinner, and the whole sum of iniquity committed throughout the earth, are continually present to the eyes of Him with whose nature they are most inconsistent. The sins of men are transgressions of the law given them by their Creator, an insult to his authority, a violation of the order which he had established, a diminution of the happiness which he had spread over his works. It is unknown to us what connexions there are amongst different parts of the universe. But it is manifest that no government can subsist if the laws are transgressed with impunity. It is very conceivable that the other creatures of God might be tempted to disobedience, if the transgressions of the human race received no chastisement. And therefore, as every temptation to disobey laws which bring peace to the obedient, is really an introduction to misery, it appears most becoming the Almighty, both as the Ruler and the Father of the universe, to execute his judgments against the human race. Accordingly the Scriptures record many awful testimonies of the divine displeasure with sin ; and they represent the whole world as the children of wrath, guilty before God, and under the curse, because they are the children of disobedience. It is not in the nature of repentance to avert those evils which past transgressions had deserved. But we have seen that men were unable to forsake their sins ; and we cannot form a conception of any mode,

consistent with the honour and the great objects of the divine government, by which a creature who continues to transgress the divine laws, can stop the course of that punishment, which is the fruit of his transgression.

In this situation, when the reasonings of nature fail, and every appearance in nature conspires to show that hope is presumptuous, the revelation of the Gospel is fitted by its peculiar character to enlighten and revive the human mind. We there learn that God, who is rich in mercy, moved by compassion for the work of his hands, for the great love wherewith he loved the world, conceived a plan for delivering the children of Adam from that sin and misery out of which they were unable to extricate themselves.* Having foreseen, before the foundation of the world, that they would yield to the temptation of an evil spirit, and abuse that liberty which forms an essential part of their nature, he comprehended in the same eternal counsel a purpose to create, and a purpose to save.† Immediately after the transgression of the first man there was some discovery of the gracious plan. At the same time that a curse is pronounced upon the ground, and death is declared to be the punishment of sin, there is an intimation of future deliverance in these words: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”‡ The promise was unfolded, and the plan gradually

* Ephes. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Rom. iii. 19; v. 12. Gal. iii. 10, 22, Col. iii. 5, 6, 7.

† Ephes. iii. 11.

‡ Gen. iii. 15.

opened through a succession of dispensations, all conspiring in their place to produce the fulness of time, when the plan was executed by the manifestation of that glorious person whom prophecy had announced. The light of nature does not give any notice of the existence of this person. But as the importance of the office which he executed renders his character most interesting to the human race, the Scriptures declare that he was with God in the beginning, that he had glory with the Father before the world was, that by him God made the worlds, that he was God, but that veiling his glory, although he could not divest himself of the nature of God, he was born in a miraculous manner, was made in the likeness of men, took part of flesh and blood, and dwelt with those whom he is not ashamed to call his brethren.* The purpose for which this extraordinary messenger visited the earth, was declared by the angel who announced the singular manner of his birth: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."† John his forerunner thus marked him out: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."‡ He said of himself, "I am come to call sinners to repentance; to give my life a ransom for many."§ And the charge which he gave to his apostles, and which they executed in all their discourses and writings, was this, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name amongst all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.|| These

* John i. 1, 2, 3, 14; xvii. 5. Heb. i. 2; ii. 14. Phil. ii. 6, 7. Luke i. 26—38.

† Matth. i. 21.

‡ John i. 29.

§ Matth. ix. 13; xx. 28.

|| Luke xxiv. 47.

expressions imply that the peculiarity of the Jewish state was concluded by the appearance of this prophet, and that the benefit of his manifestation was to extend to all nations. The same expressions imply also that the nature of that benefit was accommodated to what we have found the situation of mankind to require. In fulfilment of that character of a Saviour which he assumed, he not only taught men the will of God by precept and by example, unfolded that future state in which they are to receive according to the deeds done in the body, and enforced the practice of righteousness by every motive addressed to the understanding and the affections, but he voluntarily submitted to the most grievous sufferings, and the most cruel death, as the method ordained in the counsel of heaven for procuring their deliverance from sin. There is no mode of expression that we can devise, which is not employed by Scripture to convey this conception, that the death of Christ was not barely a confirmation of the truth of Christianity, an example of disinterested benevolence and of heroic virtue, but a true sacrifice for sin, offered by him to God the Father, in order to avert the punishment which the sins of men deserved, and to render it consistent with the character of the Deity and the honour of the divine laws, to forgive men their trespasses. “I am the good shepherd,” says Jesus; “the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”* “God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.”† “We are redeemed with the precious

* John x. 11.

† Rom. iii. 25.

blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* The natural conclusion which any person, whose mind is not warped by a particular system, will draw from these and numberless other expressions of the same kind, is this, that as the scheme for the deliverance of the human race originated from the love of God the Father, so it was accomplished by the instrumentality of that person, who is called in Scripture the Son of God.

As the effect of this instrumentality is clearly declared in Scripture, so it is analogous to one part of the divine procedure which we have often occasion to observe. The whole course of human affairs is carried on by alternate successions of wisdom and folly. Evils are incurred, and they are remedied. The good affections or the generosity of some are employed to retrieve the faults or the misfortunes of others: and the condescension and zeal, with which the talents of an exalted character are exerted in some cause which did not properly belong to him, are often seen to restore that order and happiness which the extravagance of vice appeared to have destroyed. The dispensation revealed in the Gospel is the same in kind with these instances, although infinitely exalted above them in magnificence and extent. We see there sin and misery entering into the world by the transgression of one man, the effects spreading through the whole race, and the remedy brought by the generous interposition of a person who had no share in the disaster, whose power of doing good was called forth purely by compassion for the distressed, and, in opposition to all

* 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

the obstacles raised by an evil spirit, was exerted with perseverance and success, in removing the deformity and disorder which he had introduced into the creation. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”* “He took part of flesh and blood, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.”†

That the interposition of the Son of God was effectual in promoting the purpose for which it was made, and that his death did really overcome that evil spirit, who is styled the prince of this world, ‡ was declared by his resurrection, and by the gifts which in fulfilment of his promise were sent upon his apostles after his ascension. § This is the Scripture proof, “that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him.”|| So speaks Peter in one of his first sermons. ¶ “The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him,” *i. e.* Our testimony of his resurrection, confirmed by the witness of the Holy Ghost, is the evidence that God hath exalted him to be a Saviour. He is now, by the appointment of God, the dispenser

* 1 John iii. 8.

† John xiv. 30.

|| Heb. vii. 25.

‡ Heb. ii. 14, 15.

§ Rom. i. 4. Acts ii. 32, 33.

¶ Acts v. 30—32.

of those blessings which he died to purchase ;* the Mediator of the new covenant, which was sealed by his blood, and which is established upon better promises,† of the fulfilment of which we receive perfect assurance from the power that is given to him in heaven and in earth.‡ Pardon, grace, and consolation, flow from him as their proprietor, who hath acquired by his sufferings the right of distributing gifts to men.§ “ Being justified by his blood, we have peace with God, and access to the Father through him.”|| He is now the advocate of his people,¶ who appears in the presence of God for them ;** “ who ever lives to make intercession,”†† and by whom their prayers and services are rendered acceptable.‡‡ He directs the course of his Providence, so as to promote their welfare, not by abolishing the present consequences of sin, but by rendering them medicinal to the soul:§§ and death, which is still allowed to continue as a standing memorial of the evil of sin, shall at length be destroyed by the working of his mighty power, which is able to quicken the bodies that had been mingled with the dust of the earth.|||| “ I am,” says he, “ the resurrection and the life.”¶¶ “ The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and

* Heb. xii. 2.

† Matth. xxviii. 18.

|| Rom. v. 1, 2, 9, 11. Eph. ii 18.

** Heb. ix. 24.

‡‡ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

|||| Phil. iii. 21.

† Heb. viii. 4 ; ix. 12, 15.

§ Ephes. iv. 8.

¶ 1 John ii. 1.

†† Rom. viii. 34.

§§ Rom. viii. 28.

¶¶ John ii. 25.

shall come forth.”* “Power is given him over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as he will.”† And the crown of life that shall be conferred at the last day upon those for whom it is prepared, is represented in Scripture not as a recompense which they have earned, but as the gift of God through him. “The wages of sin is death; but eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”‡

In this manner the blessings which that divine Person who interposed for the salvation of mankind is able to bestow, imply a complete deliverance from the evils of sin. “As through one man’s offence, death reigned by one, so they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one Jesus Christ.”§

Hitherto we have confined our attention to the interposition of that Person, who appeared upon earth to save his people from their sins. But we are introduced in the gospel to the knowledge of a third Person, who concurs in the salvation of mankind; who proceedeth from the Father, who is sent by the Son as his Spirit, || whose power is spoken of in exalted terms, ¶ to whom the highest reverence is challenged,** and who, in all the variety of his operations, is one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every one severally as he will.†† One God and Father of all is known by the works of nature: the Son of God is made known by revelation, because the world which he had made stood in need of his

* John v. 28, 29.

† John xvii. 2.

‡ Rom. vi. 23.

§ Rom. v. 17.

|| John xv. 26.

¶ Acts iv. 31, 33.

Rom. viii. 11, 26. 2 Cor. iii. 17, 18.

** Heb. ix. 14; x. 29.

†† 1 Cor. xii. 4—11.

interposition to redeem it: and the Spirit is made known by the same revelation, because the benefits of this redemption are applied through his agency. Our knowledge in this way grows with our necessities. We learn how inadequate our faculties are to comprehend the divine nature, when we see such important discoveries superinduced upon the investigations of the most enlightened reason. And we learn also that the measures of knowledge, which the Father of Spirits sees meet to communicate, are not intended to amuse our minds with speculation, and to gratify curiosity, but are immediately connected with the grounds of our comfort and hope. They comprehend all that is necessary for us in our present circumstances. But they may be far from exhausting the subject revealed: and from the very great addition which the revelation of the Gospel has made to our knowledge, it is natural for us to infer that creatures in another situation, or we ourselves in a more advanced state of being, may see distinctly many things, which we now in vain attempt to penetrate. The mode in which the Son and the Spirit subsist, and the nature of their connexion with the Father, however much they have been the subject of human speculation, are nowhere revealed in Scripture. But the offices of these persons, being of infinite importance to us, are revealed with such hints only of their nature, as may satisfy us that they are qualified for these offices.

We have seen the office of the Son in the redemption of the world, the right which he acquired by his perfect obedience and suffering to dispense the blessings of his purchase. It is in the dispensation of these blessings that the office of the Spirit ap-

pears. This office commenced from the earliest times : “ For he spake by the mouth of all the holy prophets, who prophesied, since the world began, of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow.”* To his agency the miraculous conception of the Son of Man is ascribed.† He descended upon Jesus at his baptism:‡ he was given to him without measure during his ministry;§ and after his ascension he was manifested in the variety and fulness of those gifts which distinguished the first preachers of Christianity.|| But all these branches of the office of the Spirit, so necessary for confirming the truth, and for diffusing the knowledge of the Christian religion, were only the pledges of those ordinary influences, by which the same Divine Person continues in all ages to apply the blessings which are thus revealed.

The ordinary influences of the Spirit are represented in Scripture as opposed to all those circumstances in the present condition of human nature, which indispose men for receiving such a religion as the Gospel. Thus you read, that “ the natural man receiveth not the things of God ; they are foolishness to him, because they are spiritually discerned.”¶ But the spirit of wisdom and revelation is given to Christians, that “ the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they may know what is the hope of their calling.”** You read, that “ the carnal mind is enmity against God, and cannot be subject to his law : But they that are led by

* 1 Pet. i. 11.

§ John iii. 34.

† Luke i. 35.

|| Acts ii. 4.

‡ Luke iii. 22.

¶ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

** Ephes. i. 17, 18.

the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit.”* You read of a complacency in their own righteousness, which prevents many from submitting themselves to the righteousness of God.† But the Spirit casts down every high thought which exalteth itself.‡

In all this there is nothing contrary to the reasonable nature of man. We have daily experience of the influence which one mind has over another, by presenting objects in the light best fitted to command assent and conviction, by suggesting forcible motives, by over-ruling objections, by addressing every generous principle, and exciting every latent spark of good affection. You sometimes see or hear of persons formed for commanding others, not by force, but by an acknowledged eminence of talents and virtues : and you often see men conducted by a skilful exposition to the clear apprehension of truths which seemed to be above their capacity, and irresistibly, yet freely, led, by well-adapted persuasion, to exertions which they considered as beyond their power. All this is a very faint image indeed, but it may assist you in forming some conception of the action of the Spirit of God upon the mind of man. He, who knows every spring of that heart which he formed, every method of approach, every secret wish, every reluctant thought, and whose power over mind is as entire as that which he exercises over matter, can in various ways illuminate the darkest understanding, and bend the most stubborn will, without destroying that freedom which is the essential character of the being upon whom he acts. The influence is efficacious, and the purpose of him

* Rom. viii. 5, 7. † Rom. x. 3. ‡ 2 Cor. x. 5.

from whom it proceeds cannot be defeated. Yet the being who is thus moved has as little feeling of constraint, acts as much from choice and deliberation, as if the views and motives had occurred to his own mind without a guide, or had been suggested to him by any of his neighbours. Hence, although this influence of the Spirit is expressed in Scripture by a new creation,* and the quickening of those who were dead,† although our Lord hath said, “ Except a man be born again of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” *i. e.* become a Christian; and again, “ No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him,”‡ yet the persons thus created, quickened, and drawn, are said to be “ willing in a day of power.”§ “ Where the Spirit of the Lord is,” says the Apostle, “ there is liberty,”|| the liberty which belongs to those whose understandings know the truth, whose affections are orderly, and who are not the servants of sin. The Gospel is styled “ the perfect law of liberty.”¶ A Christian is significantly called “ the Lord’s free-man.”** And Jesus said to those who believed on him, “ If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”††

Such is the nature of that influence, which the Scriptures represent the Spirit of God as exerting upon every true Christian. The immediate effect of that influence is called in Scripture faith; a word, which, according to its etymology, πιστις, denotes a firm persuasion of truth, but which, in the Scripture

* 2 Cor. v. 17. † Ephes. ii. 1. ‡ John iii. 3, 5; vi. 44.

§ Psalm cx. 3. || 2 Cor. iii. 17. ¶ James i. 25.

** 1 Cor. vii. 22.

†† John viii. 36.

sense of the word, comprehends all the sentiments and affections which naturally arise from a firm persuasion of the truth of Christianity; a cordial acquiescence in the doctrines of the Gospel, a thankful acceptance of the method of salvation from sin there offered, a reliance upon the promises of God, and a submission to his will. Although an acquaintance with the historical evidences of the truth of Christianity be the natural foundation of a persuasion of its truth, yet a person may have studied these evidences with care, and may be able to answer the objections that have been urged against them, who, at the same time, from some wrongness of mind, does not attain to the sentiments and dispositions implied under faith. The Scriptures hold forth examples of this in the enemies of our Lord during his life, who had clearer evidences of his divine mission before their eyes than we are able to attain with all our investigation, and in many of those, who, by teaching and doing wonderful works in his name, had that evidence within themselves, yet are for ever separated from him by his own declaration.* And these examples will not appear strange to any person who has bestowed a philosophical attention upon the inconsistencies in the human mind, and the small influence which deductions of the understanding often appear to have upon the heart. On the other hand, both the Scriptures and our own experience afford many examples of persons, who, with limited information and narrow powers of reasoning, yet by a tractable disposition, a love of the truth, and a fairness of mind, have attained to what the Scriptures

* Matt. vii. 22, 23.

call faith, and become the disciples of Christ indeed. To this purpose Jesus says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."* And again, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;" *i. e.* Except ye receive the truth with that freedom from prejudice, that desire of learning, and that simplicity of intention, which are all implied in the character of children, ye cannot become Christians.† In another place, our Lord says, "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;"‡ and he explains the good soil, in which the seed fell that produced an hundred fold, by a good and honest heart, in which they keep the word, who bring forth fruit with patience.§ All these expressions imply not merely that faith is an exercise of understanding, but that a certain preparation of heart is requisite for it; and hence you will perceive that, although faith be a reasonable act proceeding upon evidence, there is room for the influence of the Spirit in disposing the mind to attend to the evidence, and to see its force, in overcoming prejudice, and carrying home the truth with power to the heart. Accordingly the Apostle Paul says expressly, that faith is "the gift of God;"|| and this declaration is only expressing, in one sentence, the uniform doctrine of Scripture upon this subject.

Faith, which is thus produced by the influence of

* Matt. xi. 25, 26. † Matt. xviii. 3. ‡ John vii. 17.

§ Luke viii. 15.

|| Ephes. ii. 8.

the Spirit of God upon the mind of man, is the character with which a participation of the blessings of the Gospel is always connected in Scripture. These blessings were acquired, and are dispensed by the Lord Jesus. But they are applied by his Spirit only to them who believe. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned." "This is the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." We are said to be "justified by faith:" and the only direction which Paul gave to the jailer, when he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" was this, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."*

Declarations of this kind abound in Scripture. But there are two mistakes which such declarations are apt to occasion; and both are so opposite to the Scripture system, that they require to be mentioned in this short account of it.

The first mistake, into which you may be led by the Scripture declarations concerning faith, is to imagine that faith is the procuring cause of our salvation; that because Christ says, "this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent," any person who does the work receives the blessings of the Gospel as the wages which he has earned. But such an opinion contradicts all the views which

* John iii. 16. Mark xvi. 16. Rom. x. 8, 9; v. i. Acts xvi. 30, 31.

we have hitherto deduced from Scripture. For the Gospel being a salvation from sin, those who are to be saved are considered as sinners, until they partake of the salvation. The investiture with a certain character is indeed a present, and in some sense an immediate effect of the salvation, and is so inseparably connected with it, as to be the Scripture mark, that a person has "passed from death unto life." But being an effect, it cannot in the nature of things be a cause of that from which it proceeds; and therefore the Scriptures speak in perfect consistency with themselves, when they declare, "God hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus."* "When we were dead in sins, he quickened us together with Christ, for by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."† Faith is the instrument by which the Spirit of God applies to us the blessings which Christ hath acquired the right of dispensing. But there is no merit in the instrument. Since all had sinned, and come short of the glory of God, "we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;" and he is "the Lord our righteousness."

The second mistake into which you may be led by the Scripture declaration concerning faith is, that faith is the only thing which is required of a Christian. If all that Paul said to the jailer was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," it seems to follow that, if he believed,

* 2 Tim. i. 9.

† Ephes. ii. 1. 8.

it mattered not how far he disregarded every other precept of the Gospel. But the Scriptures, by all their descriptions of faith, mean to teach us that it cannot be alone. It is the principle of a divine life, by which we are united to Christ and derive from him grace and strength for the discharge of every duty. It works by love, and purifies the heart, and overcomes the world. So we read in Scripture of a life of faith, of the obedience of faith, of faith being dead, because it is without works. "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."* Here then you will mark the place which good works hold in the Christian system. They are not the ground of our acceptance with God, for the whole world, according to this system, being guilty before God, we must have remained for ever excluded from his favour had good works been the condition upon which our being received into it was suspended. "Therefore," the Apostle Paul says, "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God." Neither are those the good works of a Christian, which, although fit in themselves, and profitable to those who do them, and to others, are done merely upon considerations of reason, honour, and conscience, which ought to actuate the mind in every situation. But the good works required in the Gospel flow from faith, *i. e.* they are performed in the spirit of a Christian, from the motives suggested by a firm persuasion of the truth of the Gospel. Good works, therefore, are stated in Scripture as the fruits and evidences of faith, the necessary effect of the

* Gal. v. 6; ii. 20. Acts xv. 9. 1 John v. 4. Rom. i, 5; iii. 31. James ii. 12.

operation of the Spirit of God. "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them;" * and there thus appears to be the most perfect consistency between the doctrine of Paul and that of James. Paul says, that we are not justified by any thing that we can do ourselves, but freely by grace, through faith in the blood of Christ. James says, Show me thy faith by thy works; faith without works is dead, as the body without the spirit. And he concludes, that a man is justified not by faith only, *i. e.* by such a faith as does not produce what Paul had stated to be the constant effect of true faith, but by that faith which by works is made perfect.

As the Gospel calls men, by motives peculiar to itself, and with an energy which no other system ever possessed, to the practice of righteousness, so it is uniformly supposed in Scripture, that the followers of Jesus are to be distinguished by the zeal and constancy with which they abound in the work of the Lord. The question of our Lord, "What do ye more than others?" and such expressions as these, "being dead to sin," "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts," "being alive unto God," "putting on the new man," "walking after the Spirit," imply an eminence and uniformity of virtues, a light which shines before men. That innocence which the laws of our country enjoin, that measure of virtue which a regard to public opinion or even the principles of natural religion require, falls very far short of the evangelical standard. It

* Ephes. ii. 10.

is the duty of a Christian to aspire after perfection, yet never to count that he has attained it; to forsake the vices of others, and to endeavour to excel their virtues, yet to be deeply sensible of his own imperfection, and ready to allow his brethren all the praise which they deserve; to fill up his life with the various exertions of active, diffusive, disinterested benevolence, yet to guard against the emotions of vanity, and that spirit of ostentation by which a good deed loses all its value; and to ascribe the honour of his progress in virtue, not to his natural disposition, to his own diligence and watchfulness, or to any concurrence of favourable circumstances, but to that God who called him to the knowledge of the Gospel, to that Saviour by the faith of whom he lives, and to that Spirit by whose influence he is sanctified.

The Scriptures assure us that the good works which thus proceed from faith, although imperfect in degree, and mingled with many infirmities, are well pleasing in the sight of God through Jesus Christ. He, in allusion to the Jewish law, is represented as the high priest over the house of God, who, having yielded a perfect obedience to the divine law, has no occasion to make any offering for his own sins, but appears in the presence of God for his people.* And the good works which they perform through the strength which his Spirit imparts, are styled spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by him.† The Almighty lifts the light of his countenance upon those who offer this sacrifice; he admits them into his family; he rejoices over them to do

* Heb. vii. 25—28.

† 1 Peter ii. 5.

them good ; he chastens them with the tenderness of a father ; he seals them by his Spirit unto the day of redemption ; and he will receive them hereafter to that incorruptible inheritance, which is not due to their services, but a reward of grace, purchased by the death of Christ, secured by his intercession, and “ reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

It appears then from the Scriptures, that the religion of Jesus, having for its ultimate design the removal of those evils which sin had introduced, destroys the present dominion of sin in all true Christians. Its tendency is to restore upon the soul of man that image of God after which he was made, to revive those sentiments and desires which constitute the excellence and dignity of his nature, to elevate his affections from earth to heaven, and, at the same time, to enforce the discharge of those relative duties which his present condition renders necessary to the comfort of society. It is plain that if this religion were universally acknowledged and obeyed, the character of every individual would be rescued from the degradation of vice, and assimilated to the most exalted beings in the universe ; that the happiness of human life would receive the most substantial and permanent improvement, and that the abode of the human race upon earth would be a stage in the progress of their existence to the perfection and the joys of heaven. It is not possible to conceive any design more worthy of the Father of mankind, and more beneficial to his creatures. There is implied in the nature of this design the strongest obligation upon every reasonable being to whom the

knowledge of it is communicated, to co-operate in its accomplishment : and it is specially to be remarked, in a view of the Scripture system, that this co-operation is not only required by precept, but is recommended by the most illustrious examples. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost condescend to take part in this scheme ; the angels attend to the progress of it, rejoice in the conversion of a sinner, and are “ ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.” All the prophets and holy men in ancient times, of whom the Scriptures speak, looked forward to it, and contributed in some measure to its approach. And now that it is manifested, every one is called upon to be a worker together with God. The whole Christian world is represented as one great society, united, by their submission to the same Master and by the guidance of the same Spirit, in following “ after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord ;” and “ after the things—wherewith one may edify another.”

We are warranted to speak of this co-operation in accomplishing the great design of the Gospel ; for although the Scriptures represent the blessings there revealed as acquired by the interposition of the Son of God, and the character necessary in order to a participation of them as originating from the influence of the Spirit, yet they uniformly address us in a style which supposes that there is something for us to do. We are commanded to “ work out our own salvation,” and we are required to help our brethren in the good ways of the Lord. We soon bewilder ourselves in our speculations, when we attempt to settle the boundaries between the agency of God and the agency of man. But the Scriptures,

without condescending to enter into these discussions, abound in exhortations ; and we cannot suppose that our shallow reasonings upon subjects so infinitely above our comprehension, will be sustained as an excuse for neglecting to obey precepts so often repeated and so plainly expressed.

The Scriptures mention various means, which the Spirit of God employs, in producing that faith which is the principle of the Christian character, and those good works which flow from this principle. But they have nowhere furnished any marks to distinguish the natural operation of these means from that agency of the Spirit, without which they are ineffectual. “The wind,” says our Lord, “bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The Spirit may act as he will, but there is no warrant to expect that the conversion of any individual will be brought about in a sudden sensible manner. The exercises of a pious education, the habits of virtuous youth, the impressions fixed upon the mind by the continued instruction and conversation of the wise, may have so gradually disposed a person for receiving the Gospel in faith, that he shall not be able to mark any great change which ever took place in the state of his soul, or the time when faith, the gift of God, was imparted to him by the Spirit. Yet this man may appear to be a Christian indeed, by bringing forth in his life those fruits of the Spirit, which are the evidences of faith. The assurance which arises from these evidences may give him that “peace of God which passeth understanding ;” and the Spirit itself may bear witness

with his spirit that he is a child of God. From hence we deduce the duty of using the means by which the influences of the Spirit are ordinarily conveyed, and the presumption of all who, undervaluing the means, say that they wait for an extraordinary instantaneous illapse of the Spirit. Hence too you perceive the reason why the Scriptures represent the earliest Christians, and speak of Christians in all succeeding ages, as a society distinguished by certain regulations and outward ordinances. If the Spirit operated immediately upon every individual, all these would be a yoke of ceremonies. But if the heavenly gift, as well as the common bounties of Providence, is to be dispensed by the instrumentality of men, the establishment of what we call a church is necessary for “perfecting the saints, and for edifying the body of Christ.” So speaks the apostle Paul. “How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? So faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”* The promise of our Lord to his apostles, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world,” seems, by the terms of it, to extend to a much longer period than their ministry required: and that it does really imply the presence of Jesus with his church in all ages, not indeed by extraordinary inspiration, but by his countenance and protection, is manifest from another declaration of his,

* Rom. x. 14, 15.

“The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church,” and from the practice of his apostles, who ordained teachers, overseers of the flock, in every city where they preached, and who made provision that the instruction which they gave by word or writing should be transmitted to future generations. “The things,” says Paul to Timothy, the minister of Ephesus, “that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”* Some of the epistles of Paul contain a delineation of the form of those churches to the ministers of which he writes, and directions concerning the conduct of the several office-bearers, and concerning the exercise of discipline. There can be no doubt that this form had been established by his authority ; and it is natural for all Christian churches to endeavour to show that their ecclesiastical institutions do not depart far from it. Yet it is nowhere said that this ought to be the form of the church universal : and there are expressions in the epistles of Paul which imply that Christians are allowed to use a prudent accommodation to circumstances in matters of external order. The spirit of Christianity calls our attention to things infinitely more important than the varieties of church government. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost :” † and those societies, whose institutions approach nearest to the apostolical practice, have no warrant to condemn their brethren, who have been led by a different progress of society to establishments farther removed from it.

* 2 Tim. ii. 2.

† Rom. xiv. 17.

But amidst this difference in matters of order, which the Scriptures do not condemn, there are points resulting from the design of their institution in which all churches ought to agree, otherwise they are not the churches of Christ. They must acknowledge him as their head and master, teaching no other doctrine than that form of sound doctrine, which is to be gathered from the writings of his apostles. They must maintain that spiritual worship which he hath substituted in place of the idolatry of the heathen, and the ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation; and they must observe, according to his institution, the ordinances which he hath established in his church. We apply the word ordinances or sacraments to baptism and the Lord's Supper; the first, a rite borrowed from the Jewish custom of plunging into water the proselytes from heathenism to the law of Moses, but consecrated by the words of Jesus, and the universal practice of his disciples, as the mode of admitting members into the Christian society; the second, a rite which originated in the affectionate leave which our Lord took of his disciples at the domestic feast that followed the celebration of the Jewish passover. The words of the institution, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come," imply that the Lord's supper is, by the appointment of Christ, a perpetual ordinance in the Christian church, in which there is a thankful commemoration of the benefits purchased by his death; and the Scriptures lead us to entertain a very high conception of the spiritual effects of this ordinance with regard to those who partake of it worthily, by calling it "the communion of the body and the blood

of Christ.”* Baptism and the Lord’s supper are the external badges of the Christian profession, the rites by which the author of the Gospel meant that the society which he was to found should be distinguished from every other. They are most apposite to the peculiar doctrines of his religion; there is a simplicity and significancy in them which accords with the whole character of the Gospel; and, as they were appointed by Jesus himself, no human authority is entitled to add to their number, or to make any material alteration upon the manner of their being observed.

Upon this account, we rank the right administration of Baptism and of the Lord’s Supper, the preaching the “faith once delivered to the saints,” and the maintenance of spiritual worship, as the marks of a Christian church. We gather all the three marks from the nature of such a society, and from several places of Scripture; and we find the three brought into one view in the description, given in the book of Acts, of the 3000 who were added to the number of the disciples by the sermon, which Peter preached ten days after the ascension of Jesus. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”†

The Church of Christ, separated from the rest of the world by these marks of distinction, is not set in opposition to human government. But the Gospel, without entering into any discussion of the claims

* 1 Cor. x. 16.

† Acts ii. 41, 42.

made by subjects and their rulers, enforces obedience by the example of Jesus and of his apostles, and by various precepts such as these, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."* The ministers of this religion, although invested with a sacred character, and constituted by their master the spiritual rulers of that society, for whose good they labour, are not entitled to assume, in virtue of their office, any measure of civil power. They are not the arbiters between the parties who contend for dominion. But they co-operate with the authority of government, by their prayers, by their exhortations, and by the natural tendency of discourses composed upon the true principles of Christianity, to diffuse a general spirit of industry, sobriety, and order. Upon this account they have received, in every Christian country, the protection of the state; and in these happy lands where we live, the establishment of that form of Church government, which was supposed to be most agreeable to the inclinations of the people, is incorporated with the civil constitution. The ministers of the establishment have legal security for their livings. They have, in critical times, by their influence over public opinion, rendered very important services to their country; and, although that unwillingness to part with any portion of their property, which is felt by all the orders of the state, and which grows with the progress of luxury, may prevent any great aug-

* Matt. xxii. 21. Rom. xiii. 1. 1 Pet. ii. 13.

mentation of the moderate provision which is made for the ministers of our church, they cannot fail, while they discharge their duty, to continue to receive the countenance, the support, and the indulgence of the legislature.

CHAP. III.

CHRISTIANITY OF INFINITE IMPORTANCE.

OUT of the preceding view of the Scripture system, there arise some general observations upon which I wish to fix your attention, because I think they may be of use in preparing your minds for the more particular discussions upon which we are to enter.

The first observation respects the importance of Christianity.

This is a subject upon which, for the reason which I mentioned in the outset, I have hitherto hardly said any thing. The common method is, to place what is called the necessity of revelation before the evidences of it, and to argue from the necessity to the probability of its having been given. But I have always thought this an unfair and a presumptuous mode of arguing. It appears to me, that we are so little qualified to judge what is necessary, and so little entitled to build our expectation of heavenly gifts upon our own reasonings, that the only method becoming our distance, and our ignorance of the divine counsels, is first to establish the fact that a revelation has been given, and then to learn its importance by examining its contents. Agreeably to this method, I have led you through the principal evidences of the divine mission of Jesus; I have

given a general account of the system contained in those books, which his servants wrote by inspiration ; and I now mean to deduce from that account the importance of what the inspired books contain.

There are two views under which the importance of Christianity may be stated. We may consider the Gospel as a republication of the religion of nature, or we may consider it as a method of saving sinners.

SECTION I.

WE may consider the religion of Jesus as a republication of the religion of nature. I have adopted this phrase, because, from the very respectable authority by which it has been used, as well as from its own significancy, it has become a fashionable phrase ; and yet there are two capital mistakes which the unguarded use of it may occasion. The first is an opinion, that Christianity is merely a republication of the religion of nature, containing nothing more than the doctrines and duties which may be investigated by the light of reason. But it follows clearly from the general view of the Scripture system, that this is an imperfect and false account of Christianity ; because in that system there are doctrines concerning the Son and the Spirit, and their offices in the salvation of men, of which reason did not give any intimation ; and there are duties, resulting from the interposition recorded in the Gospel, which could not possibly exist till the knowledge of that interposition was communicated to

man. The Gospel then, professing to be more than a republication of the religion of nature, a view of its importance, proceeding upon the supposition that it is merely a republication, must be so lame as to do injustice to the system thus misrepresented.

The second mistake, which the unguarded use of this phrase may occasion, is an opinion that the religion of nature is essentially defective either in its constitution, or in the mode of its being promulgated, and that the imperfection originally adhering to it called for amendment. But this is an opinion which appears at first sight unreasonable. If the Creator intended man to be a religious creature, it is to be presumed that he endowed him in the beginning with the faculty of attaining such a knowledge of the divine nature as might be the foundation of religion. If he intended him to be a moral accountable creature, it is to be presumed that he furnished him with a rule of life. These presumptions are confirmed, when we proceed to examine the subject closely; for we cannot analyze the human mind, without discovering that an impression of the Supreme Being is congenial to many of its natural sentiments. There is a strain of fair reasoning, by which we are conducted, from principles universally admitted, to some knowledge of the divine attributes. There are obligations implied in the dependence of a reasonable being upon his Creator. There is a certain line of conduct dictated by the constitution and the circumstances of man; and there is a general expectation with regard to the future conduct of the divine government, created by that part of it which we behold, and corre-

sponding to hopes and fears of which we cannot divest ourselves. All this makes up what we call natural religion. And it is manifestly supposed in Scripture; for we read there, that “that which may be known of God is manifest among them: for God hath shown it to them; for the invisible things of God are clearly seen ever since the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead: so they are without excuse, because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God.” We read that those who had no written law “are a law to themselves, their conscience bearing witness.”* And, through the whole of Scripture, there are appeals to those notions of God which are agreeable to right reason, and to that sense of right and wrong which is there considered as a part of the human constitution. Although, therefore, some zealous unwise friends of Christianity have thought of doing honour to revelation by depreciating natural religion, and although you will find that some sects of Christians have been led by their peculiar tenets to deny that man has naturally any knowledge of God, you will not suppose that all who use the phrase, Republication of the religion of nature, adopt these opinions, or even approach to them; and you will find, that the soundest and ablest divines consider natural religion as suited to the circumstances of man at the time of his creation. If you take the known history of the human race in conjunction with the principles of human nature, you will readily perceive that the opinion of these divines is well founded.

* See Macknight's translation of Rom. ii. 15; i. 18, 19, 20.

There would undoubtedly be transmitted from the first man to his descendants a tradition of his coming into the world, and of his finding every thing there new ; and if you admit the truth of the Mosaic account, this tradition, by the long lives of the first inhabitants of the earth, would pass for many centuries through very few hands. It is to be presumed, too, even independently of the authority of Moses, that, in the infancy of the human race, there would be a more immediate intercourse between man and his Creator, than after the connexions of society had been formed and established upon the earth. This tradition and this revelation might fix the attention of the posterity of the first man upon those suggestions and deductions of reason, which give some knowledge of the being, the attributes, and the moral government of God ; and there might be thus a foundation laid for the universal observance of some kind of worship as the expression of gratitude and trust. From a sense of dependence upon the Creator, there would arise the feeling of obligation to serve him, so that natural religion would come in aid of the dictates of conscience ; and the obedience which man yielded to the law of morality, while by the constitution of his nature it was rewarded with inward peace, would enable him, by his apprehension of a righteous Sovereign of the universe, to look forward with good hope to those future scenes of the divine government under which he might be permitted to exist. I do not say that this complete system of pure natural religion ever was established in any country merely by reasoning ; but I do say, that all the parts of it may be referred to principles of reason ; that early tradition

called and directed men to apply these principles to the subject of religion ; and that, had they been properly followed out, man would have been possessed, independently of any extraordinary revelation, of a ground of religion, and a rule of life, suited to the circumstances in which he was created.

Having guarded against the second mistake which I mentioned, by fixing in your minds this preliminary point, that the religion of nature was not originally defective, you proceed to consider what importance the Gospel derives from being a republication of that religion.

You will begin with observing it to be very conceivable that the whole system of natural religion may admit of being proved by reason, and yet that particular circumstances may have prevented that continued exercise of reason, by which the knowledge of it might have been attained. We often see men remaining, through their own fault or neglect, ignorant of many things which they might have known ; and the recency of many great discoveries is a proof how slowly the human mind advances to truth, although no one is so absurd as to infer, from the abounding of error, that truth is not agreeable to reason. If there was an early departure from the duties of natural religion, it is plain that this circumstance in the history of mankind would estrange them from that God whom they were conscious of disobeying, would weaken the original impression of that law which they were breaking, and would overcast the hopes connected with the observance of it. The universal tradition of the creation might, for a few generations, in some measure counterbalance this tendency. But as men

spread over the earth, the memory of the truths received from their first parents would become fainter; as their passions were excited by a multiplicity of new objects, the restraints to which they had submitted in a simpler state of society would lose their power, and a growing corruption of religion would accompany the progress of vice. This is the very account of the matter which the apostle Paul gives us. “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, nor were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; and they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” These are the words of Paul in his Epistle to the Romans; and the best commentary upon them is the religious history of the heathen world. You need not look to those savage tribes, where the faculties of the human mind, depressed by unfavourable circumstances, have a very limited range, and man appears raised but a few degrees above the beasts with whom he associates. Recollect the polished and learned nations, whose philosophy we study, and to whose writings every scholar feels and owns his obligations; and in their religious history you will find abundant confirmation of the words of St. Paul. Although reason was there highly cultivated; although art and science made distinguished progress; although the public establishments of religion were magnificent and expensive, yet the fathers of science, in respect of religious knowledge

were as children, “and the world by wisdom knew not God.” There was a darkness with regard to the nature of God. The knowledge of one supreme Being, the Creator and Ruler of all things, the rewarder of those who seek him, the friend and protector of the good, and the avenger of the wicked, this most valuable knowledge was lost in the belief of a multiplicity of gods, who had the passions, the vices, the contentions of men, whose character and conduct, instead of administering comfort in distress, and strength under temptation, sunk the afflicted in despair, and corrupted the manners of the worshipper. There was a darkness with regard to the method of pleasing the gods. Multiplied sacrifices offered with much doubt, and with the fear of giving offence, a pageantry of costly ceremonies, a wearisome round of superstitious observances, made up the religion of the heathen, and excluded that worship in spirit and in truth, which it is the honour of a reasonable creature to offer to the Searcher of hearts. There was a darkness with regard to the duties of life. The voice of conscience was not only left without the support of true religion, but was in many instances perverted by corrupt systems. No scholar will deny, that the laws and the constitution of ancient states cherished certain public virtues which were both useful and splendid ; and the names of many citizens will be celebrated as long as the world lasts, for heroism, the love of their country, disinterestedness, and generosity. But any person, who takes a near view of the manners of the great body of the people in ancient times, finds that the established system of morality was loose and debauched ; for, although the state often required

great exertions from the citizens for its own preservation, no restraint was imposed upon the indulgence of many evil passions, and the grossest vices were conceived to be consistent with pure virtue. There was still greater darkness with regard to the hopes of men. The impression of a future state is so congenial to the mind of man, that it could not be effaced. But the opinions generally entertained with regard to the future place of both the good and the bad were mixed with a number of childish fables, which exposed to ridicule, and even brought into suspicion, that important truth which they only obscured. The wise men who arose in different ages, although they did not implicitly adopt the vulgar errors, were not fitted to dispel this darkness. Some were led by the absurdity of the received creeds rashly to reject the fundamental articles of religion ; and that they might depart as far as possible from the superstition of their countrymen, they denied the being of a God, or they excluded him from the government of the world. Those who did not thus contradict the natural sentiments of the human mind were unable to divest themselves of an attachment to prevailing opinions and universal practice ; and while their writings contain many traces of a rational system, they sacrificed in public to the gods of their country. Their writings and their discourses did enlighten the minds of their scholars. But these scholars were few. The great body of the people had neither leisure nor capacity to follow their investigations. But they saw that the practice of the philosophers did not, in any material respect, differ from their own. The authority of the wise, therefore, instead of correcting, confirm-

ed the popular system, and that system, founded in ignorance of the true God, took deep root in the minds of men, and was established by law, by example, and by custom.

I need not dwell longer upon this picture of the religious state of the heathen world. You find it drawn at full length in the books which are commonly read upon this subject, particularly in Clarke's *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*, in Leland's *Advantages of the Christian Revelation*, and in the first volume of Bishop Sherlock's *Discourses*. But even from the slight sketch that has now been given, it is manifest that there is a very great difference between the system of natural religion, which we are able to deduce from principles of reason, and the forms of religion which obtained in the most enlightened nations. It is true that the land of Judea enjoyed, from very early times, a revelation of one God. The Maker of heaven and earth was worshipped in that country for many ages without the mixture of idolatry, and a system of pure morality was contained in the books that were read in the Jewish synagogue. But the revelation which distinguished this narrow district was not intended, and was not fitted, to be the light of the world. At the time of our Saviour's birth, it was obscured by tradition; and the law given to the children of Israel, instead of being able to correct the prevailing superstition, stood in need of a more spiritual interpretation than it received from the Jewish doctors. But whatever was the measure of light which the Jews enjoyed, it extended in very scanty uncertain portions to other nations, and they were, as the apostle speaks, "without God, and

without hope in the world," till the pure system of natural religion which they had lost was republished in the Gospel.

It appears, then, from the religious history of the world, that a republication of the religion of nature was most desirable. And when you attend to the Gospel, you will find that it not only contains the knowledge which was lost, but is peculiarly fitted by its character to give such a republication as the circumstances that have been stated seem to require. Those notions of the being, the attributes, and the government of God, which, as soon as they are proposed, appear most agreeable to right reason, are delivered by a teacher who was sent from heaven to declare God to man. That law, which the Almighty wrote in the beginning upon the human heart, is taught by authority as the will of our Creator; and the hope of future recompense is established by his promise. The manifest signatures of a divine interposition, which attended the introduction of the Gospel, rouse the attention of the world to the system there republished; the form in which that system is delivered renders it level to the capacities of every one; and the institutions of the Gospel perpetuate the instruction which it conveys.

It is particularly to be remarked upon this subject, that the simplicity which distinguishes the Gospel, corresponds in the most admirable manner to its character, as a republication of the religion of nature. The ancient philosophers were accustomed to exercise their reason in profound and subtle disquisitions, and valued any system according to the depth and acuteness of thought which it discovered. There are many points respecting the nature of the

soul, the manner of its existence, and its operations, which they had investigated with much care, and which, after all their research, they found involved in much darkness. But such speculations, however agreeable an amusement they afford to a thinking mind, form no part of natural religion ; and accordingly they do not enter into the republication of it. There is not in the Gospel any delineation of the nature and properties of spiritual substances, or any solution of those questions about which the ancient schools were divided. All abstruse points are left just where they were ; and the important practical truths, in which the learned and the unlearned are equally concerned, are rested not upon long deductions of reasoning, which the great body of the people find themselves incapable of following, but upon an authority which they are at no loss to apprehend, the simple assertion of men who bring with them the most satisfying evidence that they speak the truth.

The order and precision of a philosophical system might have pleased the learned. But had the Gospel condescended, in this respect, to assimilate itself to works of human genius, it would have borne on its face this manifest inconsistency, that while it professed to teach doctrines of equal importance to all, it taught them in a manner which few only could understand. That it might be of universal use, and might truly supply what was wanting, it came at first “ not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom,” but with great plainness of words, accompanied with the demonstration of the Spirit. The book in which this republication is handed down, from the histori-

cal form of some parts, and the familiar epistolary style of others, imprints itself deeply upon every understanding, mingles itself readily with the habits and modes of thinking of ordinary men, and is retained in the memory, so as to be easily applied upon every occasion. Those who are not accustomed to form general views, to connect in their minds the parts of a whole, or to act systematically, carry away from the reading of this book detached sentences and precepts, which minister to their comfort and improvement: and even when their quotations discover narrow or mistaken notions of theology, their hearts are made better by the facility with which the quotations occur.

To all this there must be added that popular and familiar mode of instruction, which the institutions of the Gospel furnish. The crowd of worshippers, who assembled in a heathen temple to behold a splendid sacrifice, retired without any rational conceptions of the Supreme Being. No attempt was made to connect the ordinary services of religion with the information of the great body of the people, and lessons of morality were confined to the schools of the philosophers. But all who live in a Christian country enjoy, by the republication of natural religion, a standing kind of admonition, with which the world was unacquainted in former ages. Those truths and those duties which are intimately connected with the happiness of society as well as with the eternal interests of man, are placed before them in a language which every one that is willing to hear may understand. Persons, who feel themselves unequal in every other respect, are admitted to re-

ceive the same benefit and consolation. The ignorant are enlightened, and the careless are put in remembrance.

And thus, as we formerly found that the system of natural religion contained in the books of the New Testament is infinitely more perfect than any that had been published before, as we found also that the growing improvement of those that have been published since cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause than to the benefit which they derived from this republication, so to the same cause we may ascribe the universal diffusion of the principles of natural religion in every Christian country. The public establishment of Christianity is a standing memorial, a perpetual remembrancer of the fundamental truths of religion, and the great duties of life. It has given the vulgar in our days more sound and enlarged conceptions of the nature and government of God, of the extent of our obligations and our hopes, than almost any philosopher in ancient times was able to attain ; and it is not easy to find any words, which so perfectly express the difference between the heathen world and those countries where Christianity is professed in simplicity and purity, as the words by which Jeremiah foretold the change. “ After those days,” saith the Lord, “ I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts : And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord ; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.”*

* Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.

The sum of what has been said upon the first view of the importance of Christianity is this. The Gospel is a republication of the religion of nature, imparting that knowledge upon this subject, which is agreeable to the deductions of the most enlightened reason, but which unfavourable circumstances had prevented any man from attaining by means of reason, removing those errors to which no other method of instruction had applied any effectual remedy, and diffusing by its institutions, to men of every condition, the information, the instruction, and the comfort which it conveys. If knowledge be better than ignorance, if, of all kinds of knowledge, an acquaintance with the principles of true religion contribute the largest share to the consolation and improvement of human life ; and if this most valuable knowledge be now rendered accessible, extensive, and permanent,—Christianity, which has accomplished so happy a change by republishing the religion of nature, is in this view most important. It deserves to be received with thankfulness, to be cherished with care, to be honoured and encouraged by every friend of mankind. He, whose discourse or example recommends Christianity to others, contributes by so doing to preserve and to spread the light that is in the world. He, who employs any means to depreciate the public establishment of Christianity, does so far contribute to extinguish that light, and to bring back those times of heathen darkness, from which this republication of natural religion hath rescued a great part of the human race.

SECTION II.

THE general account of the Scripture system presented Christianity to us as a remedy for the depravity which has pervaded the human race. I am now to illustrate its importance considered in this view.

Although the religion of nature be liable to be obscured by the general practice of vice, yet if it were fitted by its original constitution to be the religion of a sinner, nothing more than a republication would at any time be required, in order to render it suitable to the circumstances of man. But even after the religion of nature has been restored in its original purity, the provision made by it for the comfort, the direction, and the hope of man, is inadequate to the new situation in which he is placed, by being a sinner. In this new situation, the deformity, the weakness, the depravity of mind, which belong to sin, enter into his condition ; he is also a transgressor of the divine law, and as such is liable to the consequences of transgression. But religion cannot exist in such a situation, without the knowledge of some method of obtaining pardon. For the expression which you read in the 130th Psalm, is strictly accurate. “ If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared ;” *i. e.* there can be no fear of God, no religion to a sinner, unless there be forgiveness with God : and, therefore, the first thing to be considered in judging of the importance of Christianity under

this second view is, What are the hopes of forgiveness in the religion of nature? From whence are these hopes derived?

It is manifest, that the hopes of forgiveness are not necessarily connected with that law which the religion of nature delivers. A law enjoins obedience, promises reward, it may be, to those who obey, and always denounces punishment against those who disobey. It would destroy itself, if it were delivered in these terms: You are commanded to obey, but you shall be forgiven although you transgress. The hopes of forgiveness, then, are to be sought in some part of the religion of nature distinct from the law. But it is not pretended that the religion of nature contains any specific promise of forgiveness, the record of which may be pleaded by transgressors as a bar to the full execution of the sanctions of the law. It is not possible to show the place where such a record is to be found. And therefore there is no source from which the hopes of forgiveness can be drawn under the religion of nature, but those general notions of the compassion of God, from which it may appear probable that he will accept of the repentance of a sinner, and reinstate in his favour those who have offended him, when they return to their duty. It is admitted, by all who have just notions of the divine character, that the same process of reasoning, which conducts us to the knowledge of the being of God, establishes in our minds a belief of his goodness. It is natural to think, that the goodness of the Supreme Being, when exercised to frail fallible creatures, will assume the form of compassion or long suffering. We see, in the course of his Providence, various instances of

a delay or mitigation of punishment ; and there are many appearances, which clearly indicate that we live under a merciful constitution. But we are by no means warranted from them to draw this general conclusion, that all who repent will finally be forgiven under the Divine government. You will be satisfied that this conclusion goes very far beyond the premises, if you attend to the following circumstances. The same process of reasoning which leads us to the belief of the goodness of God, ascertains also his holiness, his wisdom, and his justice, all of which seem to require the punishment of sinners. It is true that those perfections, of which our conceptions lead us to speak as separate from one another, unite in the Deity with entire harmony to form one purpose, and that there never can be any opposition among them in the Divine mind, or in the execution of the Divine counsels. But it is impossible for us to say how far any particular exercise of justice or of goodness is consistent with this harmony ; and it is manifest that every reasoning, which proceeds upon a partial view of the divine character, must be insecure. Further, we are not acquainted with the relations which subsist amongst the parts of the universe. But, we can suppose that reasons of the divine conduct, inexplicable to us, may arise from these relations ; and even in that part of the universe which is most open to our observation, although we cannot always account for the limitations of the divine goodness, we can mark instances where the long suffering of God seems to be exhausted, where repentance ceases to be of any avail, and men are left to endure, without alleviation, all the evils which they had incurred by transgression.

It is possible, that instances of this kind, which are very numerous, may be mingled with the examples of compassion in the Divine government to guard us against the conclusion which repeated compassion might seem to warrant, to give us warning that the time for repentance has an end, and that, in the final issue of the system in which we are placed, the obstinate transgressors of the divine law shall bear without remedy the full weight of that punishment which they deserve.

But even although there were not so many analogies in nature, conspiring to show that repentance is not always efficacious, the bare impossibility of demonstrating, from any known principles, that every penitent shall be forgiven, is sufficient to evince the infinite importance of Christianity. If the religion of nature, with all those intimations of the divine goodness, which are the ground of trust and hope to those who obey, does not give a positive assurance that it is consistent with the nature and government of God to forgive all who transgress, then it is plain that the new situation, into which men are brought by being sinners, renders a promise of pardon most desirable to them, because without this special declaration of the divine will, their religion must rest upon a very precarious foundation; and therefore the Gospel, whose peculiar character it is to contain such a declaration, which publishes the forgiveness of sins through the blood of him, by whom all that believe are justified, and have peace with God, deserves the name of *ευαγγελιον*, good tidings, better than any other message which the world ever heard, and is in truth the best gift which heaven could bestow. It is further to be observed,

that while the religion of nature leaves the reason of a sinner to struggle with his passions, and does not revive his soul, under the experience of his weakness, by the assurance of his receiving any assistance in the conflict, the Gospel contains a promise of grace as well as of pardon. It confirms the law of his mind by those influences of the Spirit, which we stated as perfectly consistent with the reasonable nature of man, and while it publishes the remission of sins that are past, places him in circumstances so favourable to his moral improvement as may prevent a repetition of sins. That progress in virtue, which the grace of the Gospel forms, is connected with the hope of a reward, which is infinitely more precious than the most exalted creature of God can claim as a recompence due to his obedience, but which, having been purchased by the death of Christ, is reserved in heaven to crown the feeble divided services of a degenerate race, and the security of which is so completely incorporated with the whole constitution of the law, that no doubt of this unmerited gift being at length conferred can remain in the breasts of those who live under the power of the Christian religion.

From the circumstances that have been mentioned, you may mark the precise difference between the religion of nature and the religion of Christ. The former has no original defect. When properly understood, *i. e.* when conclusions are fairly and fully drawn from premises which the light of reason may discover, it includes the most exalted views of the perfections of God, and of his moral government, and a complete delineation of the duties of man as a creature of God, an individual, and a mem-

ber of society. But being, by its constitution, the religion of those who perform their duty, it holds forth only general doubtful grounds of hope to those who transgress. The Gospel, on the other hand, having been revealed after transgression was introduced, and professing to be the religion of sinners, makes an adequate provision for the new situation of man. It is this difference which constitutes the infinite importance of Christianity. A remedy is there offered for that state of depravity which is acknowledged to be universal. The remedy is complete in its nature. But it is not of use to those by whom it is rejected. In what degree its efficacy may extend to those who never heard of it, we have no warrant to say. But it is most reasonable, that those, who refuse the remedy when it is offered to them, should remain under the disease. The disease was not created by the Gospel; it existed beforehand, and unless it be removed, the natural effects of it must be felt. The Scripture, therefore, says, that "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,"* *i. e.* the sentence of condemnation, which his sins deserve, retains its force. And he cannot surely complain, if when he despises the deliverance which the Gospel brings, he continues in the same state in which the whole world would have been, if there had been no Gospel.

Hitherto we have deduced the importance of Christianity from its suitableness to the present circumstances of man, from the value of the blessings which are peculiar to this religion, and from this

* John iii. 36.

plain position, that a rejection of it necessarily implies a forfeiture of its peculiar blessings. But we have not yet exhausted the subject, and there remain some awful views of the importance of Christianity, which imply that the rejection of it is not only a forfeiture of blessings, but is attended with a high degree of positive guilt.

In order to enter into these views, you will recollect, from the general account of the Scripture system, that the manner in which the assurance of pardon is conveyed by the Gospel discloses to us the Son and the Spirit of God, two persons, of whose existence the light of nature had not given any intimation, but who, by their active interposition in our behalf, claim the reverence and gratitude of all to whom that interposition is made known. The sentiments, which it becomes us to entertain towards any person, correspond to the knowledge that we have of his character and his exertions. And therefore as the first duties of natural religion respect the God and Father of all, who is made known to us by his works, so there are duties resulting immediately from that knowledge of the Son and the Spirit which is communicated by the Gospel; and a failure in these duties is as truly a breach of morality as any transgression of the law of nature.

It may be said, indeed, that these duties are binding only upon those who study the revelation of the Gospel, and that if any person willingly remains ignorant of the peculiar nature of that interposition which it records, he is not answerable for neglecting the duties created by that interposition. But it will readily occur to you, in answer to this objection, that a reasonable creature

is as much bound to make himself acquainted with the extent of his duty, as to perform it after it is known: and you will find that the plea, drawn from wilful ignorance or unbelief to excuse the neglect of the peculiar duties of the Gospel, is diametrically opposite to the declarations of Scripture. We read there, that "he that believeth not is condemned," for this very reason, "because he hath not believed on the name of the Son of God."* His unbelief is the cause of his condemnation. The enemies of Christianity have formed, out of such declarations, a very heavy charge against our religion. They say that the Gospel means to threaten men into a belief of its doctrines, and that the manner in which we are now stating the importance of Christianity is calculated to supply the defect of evidence by working upon the principle of fear, and to force assent in spite of reason. We admit that if this charge were true, the Gospel would indeed be unworthy of God, and unworthy of man. We admit that authority never can supply the place of truth, and that not even the immediate prospect of danger can compel a reasonable creature to yield his assent without sufficient evidence. But, at the same time, we assert, that it is often incumbent upon a reasonable creature to exercise his reason, and that he may deserve punishment for refusing his assent when sufficient evidence is offered him. In common life, we meet with many instances where men bring calamities upon themselves and their families, by not believing what they would have believed, if they had bestowed proper attention. It is therefore no

* John iii. 18.

new doctrine, and it is perfectly analogous to the ordinary procedure of the Divine government, that men should suffer for unbelief; and in the case of the Gospel, there are circumstances which render unbelief, in a peculiar degree, criminal. The Gospel contains the strongest call which a reasonable creature can receive, to exercise his reason in judging of evidence. It professes to be a message from God, the author of human nature, affording man that assistance in recovering the dignity and happiness of his nature, of which he is conscious that he stands in need. The person, who delivered this gracious and seasonable message, appealed to a series of prophecies meant to prepare the world for his coming, and to works of his own, far exceeding human power. Unlike the former servants of heaven, he called himself the Son of God; and he introduced his doctrine not as a temporary institution, looking forward to something beyond itself, but as a complete, universal, and unchangeable religion. "Last of all," says Jesus, "he sent unto them his Son, saying, they will reverence my Son." We behold here every circumstance, which is fitted to rouse attention, and which can render inattention unpardonable. That the most exalted Spirit should refuse to listen to any thing which bore the name of a message from his Creator, were presumption. But, that a feeble imperfect creature, who is conscious that he has offended God, should precipitately reject a religion which brings the offers of mercy, were madness. It might be expected, that, even although he doubted of its truth, he would eagerly examine it, because, if it be true, it brings him the most joyful tidings, and, if it be true, to reject it is to reject the

counsel of God against himself, and to exclude himself from all future hope of mercy. For you will notice, and it is an awful consideration which places the importance of Christianity in the strongest light, that, however men might flatter themselves, under the simple religion of nature, with general reasonings concerning divine mercy, the moment that a special revelation is published, promising the mercy of God upon certain terms, and disclosing a particular manner of dispensing pardon to those who repent, these general reasonings are at an end. If every one must admit that God knows better than we do, what is becoming his nature and consistent with his administration, it follows undeniably that it is most presumptuous in those who acknowledge that pardon is necessary, to reject the particular method of dispensing pardon that is revealed, and yet still to build upon uncertain reasonings an expectation that it will be dispensed. If the words which Jesus uttered be true, the hopes of nature are included in the hopes of the Gospel, and no hope is left to those who, neglecting the “great salvation spoken by the Lord,” betake themselves to the religion of nature.

“This,” then, “is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” It is supposed by your profession that you understand and acknowledge the infinite importance of Christianity considered in this view ; and it will be your peculiar business to impress upon the minds of others a sense of that importance. For this purpose you must “be ready always to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you ;” you must show, by your manner of defending Christianity,

that you are not afraid of the light, and that you consider the evidences of Christianity as capable of bearing the narrowest scrutiny, and those whom you call to receive it as entitled to examine into the truth. But your chief difficulty will be to bring them to this examination with a fair unprejudiced mind. You will meet with many who ascribe to want of evidence, or to a peculiarity in their understanding, what does in fact proceed from an evil heart. You have to encounter that pride which refuses to submit to the righteousness of God, and those evil passions, which, because they do not expect to receive indulgence under the Gospel, create a secret wish that it were false. If your labours, performed with good intention, with diligence, with prudence, and with ability, shall, through the blessing of God, overcome these obstacles, shall form in the minds of your hearers what our Lord calls a good and honest heart, and shall establish their faith upon a rational foundation, you will not only promote the welfare of society by teaching in the most effectual manner the great duties of morality, but you will be the instruments in the hand of God of saving the souls of men from death, and so carrying forward the great purpose for which this dispensation of grace was given.

I have chosen throughout this chapter to avoid a phrase which you often hear, the necessity of the Christian revelation, because that phrase, when unguardedly used, is apt to convey improper notions. It may be conceived to imply, that God was in justice bound to grant this revelation; whereas it should always be remembered, in theological discussions, that sinners have no claim to any thing,

and that the Gospel is a free gift proceeding from the unmerited grace of God, for the bestowing or withholding of which He is in no degree accountable to any of his creatures. The phrase, necessity of the Christian revelation, may also be conceived to imply, that it was impossible for God, in any other way, to save the world; whereas we have no principles that can enable us to judge what it is possible for God to do. We investigate, according to the measure of our understanding, the fitness of that which he has done. But there is an irreverence in our saying confidently, that infinite wisdom could not have devised other ways of accomplishing the same end. I have chosen rather to speak of the desirableness and the importance of Christianity, which imply all that should be meant by the necessity of it, viz. that it republishes with clearness and authority the religion of nature; that it gives the penitent that assurance of pardon which the religion of nature did not afford them; that it brings along with it an indispensable obligation upon those to whom it is made known to examine its evidence; and that it leaves those who wantonly reject it to perish in their sins.

I have spoken of this subject with an earnestness and seriousness suited to its nature. You often hear it stated from the pulpit, and there are many printed sermons where it is fully illustrated. It enters into most of the books which treat of the evidences of Christianity. But it requires from you a particular study; and when you have leisure to bestow close attention upon it, I would recommend to you to read the ablest book that ever was written against the importance of Christianity, I mean Tindal's book,

entitled, Christianity as old as the Creation. The object of the book is to show, that the law given to man at his creation was complete ; that it is published in the most perfect manner ; that it does not admit of amendment ; and that the additions, which succeeding revelations profess to make to it, are a proof that these revelations are spurious. The positions of this book, then, if they be true, completely annihilate the importance of Christianity ; for they go thus far, to show that there is nothing in the Gospel true, but what was from the beginning contained in the religion of nature, and published more universally, and with much less danger of error, by being written on the heart of man, than by being recorded in the books of the New Testament. I would not advise you to read this book, which is written with great art, without at the same time reading some of the answers to it. Leland, on the Advantages of the Christian Revelation, has given a full picture of the religious and moral state of the world, when the Gospel was published, which demonstrates that there is much false colouring in Tindal's book. Foster also, the author of Sermons and Discourses on Natural Religion, has written against Tindal. But the most complete answer, which ought to be read by every student who reads Tindal, is Conybeare's Defence of Revealed Religion. There have been few abler divines than Bishop Conybeare. He had a clear logical understanding, and his talents were whetted and called forth by very formidable antagonists. He was contemporary with Lord Bolingbroke, whose numerous writings against Christianity are replete with false philosophy, malicious

misrepresentations of facts, and keen satire. Lord Bolingbroke used to say, that it cost more trouble to demolish Conybeare's out-works, than to take the citadel of any of his other opponents ; an expression which implies, that this divine took always strong ground, and knew well where to rest his defence. Accordingly in his answer to Tindal's book, he has detected all its sophisms and equivocations : he has affixed a precise meaning to his words, and has shown, in a train of the most convincing and masterly reasoning, that that republication of the religion of nature, and that method of redemption, which the Gospel contains, were most desirable ; and that these views of the importance of Christianity are not inconsistent with the original perfection which every sound theist ascribes to the law of nature. Bishop Conybeare's book is a complete illustration of the importance of Christianity. But there are three other names which cannot be omitted at this time. Clarke, in his *Evidences*, has stated fully what is commonly called the necessity of revelation. In the first volume of *Sherlock's Discourses*, which is almost wholly occupied with this subject, you find those luminous views which distinguish the writings of that eminent prelate ; and Bishop Butler, in the first chapter of the second part of his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*, with rather less obscurity than is found in other chapters of that precious treatise, but with no less depth of thought, has stated, in a short compass, the importance of Christianity.

Leland on the Christian Revelation.
 Foster on Natural Religion.

Conybeare's Defence of Revealed Religion.

Clarke's Evidences.

Sherlock's Discourses.

Butler's Analogy.

Paley's Evidences.

Brown against Tindal.

Halyburton on Deism.

CHAP. IV.

DIFFICULTIES IN THE SCRIPTURE SYSTEM.

A SECOND general observation arising out of the short account of the Scripture system, is this, that we may expect to find in that system many things which we do not fully comprehend. Deistical writers urge this as an objection against the Gospel. They say that it is the very character of revelation to make every thing plain, but that a system which contains mysteries, leaves us still in the dark, and therefore, that the mysteries with which the Gospel abounds, are a convincing evidence that it did not proceed from the God of light and truth. The same word, mysteries, which generally enters into the statement of this objection, occurs often in the writings and the discourses of many pious Christians, who mean to speak of the Gospel with the highest reverence. And yet, there is reason to think, that neither the former class of writers, nor the latter, have paid a proper attention to the Scripture use of the word. Upon this account, before I proceed to answer the objection by illustrating my second observation, I shall state the sense in which the Scriptures use the word mystery, and in so doing shall

explain the reason why I choose to avoid that word upon this subject.

The ceremonies of the ancient heathen worship were of two kinds. Some were public, performed openly in the temple, before the great body of the people who were supposed to join in them. Others were private, performed in a retired place, often in the night, far from the view of the multitude; and they were never divulged to the crowd, but were communicated only to a few enlightened worshippers. The persons to whom these secret rites were made known, were said to be initiated; and the rites themselves were called *μυστηρια*. Every god had his secret as well as his open worship; and hence various mysteries are occasionally mentioned by ancient writers. "But," says Dr. Warburton, who has investigated this subject in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, "of all the mysteries, those which bore that name by way of eminence, the Eleusinian, celebrated at Athens in honour of Ceres, were by far the most renowned, and, in course of time, eclipsed, and almost swallowed up the rest. Hence Cicero, speaking of Eleusina, says, *ubi initiantur gentes orarum ultimæ*."* I have quoted this passage from Warburton, because it contains the reason why you seldom read of any other than the Eleusinian mysteries, although the word had originally a general acceptation. The theme of the word is *μύω*, *occludo*, from whence comes *μύεω*, in *sacris instituo*, referring to the silence which the initiated were required to observe; and from *μύεω* comes *μυστηριον*, the amount of which may be considered as equivalent to *arcanum*.

* Vol. ii. book ii. 4.

The writers of the New Testament have adopted this word, which was at that time well understood ; and it is used by them in a variety of instances to denote that which God had purposed, but which was not known to men till he was pleased to reveal it. When the disciples of Jesus came to him, and said, “ Why speakest thou to the people in parables?” his answer was, Matt. xiii. 11, “ Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given,” *i. e.* there are circumstances respecting the nature and the history of my religion, which I explain clearly to you my disciples by whom it is to be published, but which it is proper at present to convey to the people under the disguise of parables. You will not understand however, from these words, that there were always to continue, under the religion of Jesus, two kinds of instruction, one for the initiated, and one for the vulgar ; for our Lord had said to these very disciples a little before, Matt. x. 26, 27, “ There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light, and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house tops.” Accordingly, when the apostles came forth to execute their commission, the character under which they appeared is thus expressed by Paul, 1 Cor. iv. 1 : “ Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God :” dispensers of that knowledge which was communicated to us first, for this very purpose, that we might be the instruments of conveying it to others. Paul calls the Gospel, Col. i. 26,—“ The mystery hid from ages and from generations; but now made manifest to his

saints," hid from ages, because it was not investigated by reason, and must have remained for ever unknown, if it had not been declared by God in his word. The rejection of the Jewish nation, who had always considered themselves as the favourite people of heaven, is called a mystery, Rom. xi. 25, because it was very opposite to the opinions and expectations of men; and for the same reason, the calling of the heathen by the Gospel to partake of all the privileges of the people of God is in many places styled a mystery. Ephes. iii. 3, 5, 6. I mention only one other instance, 1 Cor. xv. 51. The resurrection of the body is called a mystery, because, although many philosophers had speculated concerning the immortality of the soul, it had never entered into the minds of any that the body was to rise.

Dr. Campbell, in the first volume of his new translation of the Gospels, has one dissertation upon the word mystery. He states that the leading sense of *μυστήριον*, in the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament, is *arcanum*, any thing not published to the world, though perhaps communicated to a select number. With his usual accurate and minute attention, he mentions another meaning very nearly related to the former, or more properly only a particular application of that general meaning. It is sometimes employed to denote the figurative sense, which is conveyed under any fable, parable, allegory, symbolical action, or dream. The reason of this application is obvious. The literal meaning of a fable is open to the senses; the spiritual meaning requires penetration and reflection, and is known only to the intelligent. In Rev. i. 20, and xvii. 7, John saw the figures, but he did not under-

stand the meaning intended to be conveyed by them; till it was explained to him by the angel. To him it was *arcanum*. There is an allusion to this import of the word mystery in Mark iv. 11. "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables." The Eleusinian mysteries being accessible only to the initiated, the early Christians, to whom the language and the practice of the heathen were familiar, transferred to the Lord's Supper the word mysteries; because from that ordinance were excluded the catechumens, who had not yet been baptized, and the penitents, who had not yet been restored to the communion of the church. It was administered only to those who had been initiated by baptism; and from fear of persecution it was often administered in the night. On account of this secrecy, and the select number of communicants, strangers might apprehend a similarity between the Lord's Supper and the heathen mysteries; and from whomsoever this use of the word originated, the Christians might not be unwilling to retain it, as conveying, according to the language of the times, an exalted conception of their distinguishing rites.

It appears then, from this deduction, that there are three acceptations of the word *μυστηριον*. In the New Testament it is used to express that which God had purposed from the beginning, which was not known till he was pleased to reveal it, but which by the revelation was shown and made manifest. With early ecclesiastical writers, it means the solemn positive rites of our religion; and so, in the communion service of the church of England, the elements after

consecration are called holy mysteries. In modern theological writings, and in the objections of the deists, mystery denotes that which is in its nature so dark and incomprehensible, that it cannot be understood after it is revealed. As this sense is really opposite to the sense in which the Scriptures use the word mystery, it appears to me advisable, both in discourses to the people, and in theological discussions, to choose other expressions for denoting that which cannot be comprehended.

But although, by avoiding an unscriptural use of a Scripture word, we may guard against the abuses and mistakes which the change of its meaning has probably occasioned, yet we readily admit that there are, in the Scripture system of the Gospel, many points which we do not fully comprehend. And this is so far from being a solid objection to the Gospel, that to every wise inquirer it appears to arise from the nature of that dispensation. In order to account for the difficulties which are found in the revelation made by the Gospel, we may follow the same division which occurred when we were speaking of the importance of Christianity, and consider the Gospel as a republication of the religion of nature, and as a method of saving sinners.

1. Even were the Gospel nothing more than a republication of the religion of nature, we could not expect to find every thing in it plain; for we have experience that many points in natural religion, concerning the evidence of which we do not entertain any doubt, are to our understanding full of difficulties. We have very indistinct conceptions of the nature of spirits, or of the manner in which spirit acts upon matter. The eternity and infinity of God

are connected with all the intricate speculations concerning time and space. The origin of evil, under the government of a Being, whose wisdom and goodness are not restrained by any want of power, has perplexed the human mind ever since it began to reason ; and liberty, the very essence of morality, appears to be affected by that dependence of a moral agent upon the influence of a superior Being, which is inseparable from the notion of his being a creature of God. Reason is unable to solve all the difficulties that have been started upon these points, yet she draws, from premises within her reach, this conclusion, that a Spirit who exists in all times and places exercises a moral government over free agents. Revelation has given assurance to this conclusion, has diffused the knowledge of it, and inculcates with authority the practical lessons which it implies. But revelation, far from professing to enter into the speculations connected with this conclusion, leaves man, with regard to many metaphysical questions that have no influence upon his virtue or happiness, in the same darkness which all the sages of antiquity experienced. A clear explication of these points, supposing it possible, might have afforded amusement to a few inquisitive minds. To the great body of mankind, for whose sake the religion of nature is republished in the Gospel, it is insignificant, and would have only loaded a system whose simplicity is fitted to render it of universal use, with subtleties which the generality find neither interesting nor intelligible. Such an explication, then, would have been of little importance. I said, supposing it possible ; for they who demand it, know not what they ask. Difficulties in any subject are merely relative

to the understanding and opportunities of those who consider it. As a child cannot form any conception of the nature of the exertion which is made, or of the object which is proposed in many of the employments of men: as a man, whose mind has been untutored, or whose observation has been narrow, wonders at the discoveries of Astronomy, or the refined operations of art, and while he believes that both exist, is incapable of apprehending the principles upon which they proceed: so it is likely that we feel ourselves involved in an inextricable labyrinth upon questions, which superior orders of being can easily resolve. We inhabit a spot in the creation of God. We are placed in a system consisting of many parts, the relations and dependencies of which are beyond our observation; and our faculties in vain attempt to explore the intimate essence of those objects which are most familiar to us. There are measures of knowledge to which our condition is manifestly not suited. There is a degree of mental exertion of which we may be supposed incapable. "Now we see through a glass darkly;" and it is forgetting our condition and our character, to ask that every thing in nature should at present be made plain to our apprehension. If there be such a thing as Natural Religion, the comfort and improvement which it administers cannot imply a kind of illumination, which man is not qualified to receive. They must be compatible with the rank which he holds in the intellectual system, and they may leave him unacquainted with many parts of that system, the whole extent of which he is at present incapable of apprehending. It cannot, therefore, be stated as an objection to the gospel,

that while, by republishing the religion of nature, it restores that comfort and improvement in the most perfect manner, it keeps his knowledge confined within the limits suited to his condition. Other orders of spirits may clearly apprehend the nature of objects, and the solution of questions, to which his faculties are inadequate ; because the knowledge of them is not, in any degree, necessary for his enjoyment of the portion, or his discharge of the duties, assigned him by his Creator.

2. If difficulties belong to the Gospel, as it is a republication of the religion of nature, we may expect to meet with more difficulties, when we consider it in its higher character, as the religion of sinners. By this character, the Gospel makes provision for a new situation, which had brought upon men evils, any remedy of which was not suggested by their knowledge of nature. We found that all those notions of the Divine character and government, which constitute natural religion, fail us in this new situation ; and that the assurance of pardon rests upon an interposition of the Creator. What parts of the universe may be affected by that interposition we cannot say ; and it is presumptuous to think, that all the branches and the ends of it may be fully comprehended by our understanding, since it is a subject confessedly farther beyond our reach than any part of nature. But if the revelation of the Gospel leaves no doubt that the interposition has been made, and that the effects of it with regard to us are attained, this is all the knowledge that is of real importance upon the subject. Clear evidence of the fact is sufficient to revive our hopes ; and although the manner in which the interposition is calculated to produce the effect had not been, in

any measure, revealed to us, we should have been in no worse situation with regard to this fact than with regard to many others in nature, most important to our being and comfort, where we know that an effect exists, but have no apprehension of the kind of connexion between the effect and its cause. If this interposition involve the agency of other beings that are not made known to us by the light of nature, and if their agency be a ground of hope, or the principle of any duty, the revelation must inform us that they exist. But the knowledge of their existence and agency does not require an intimate acquaintance with their nature. There are in natural religion many intricate questions concerning the manner in which the Deity exists, that do not in the least affect the proof of his existence. The manner in which those beings exist, who are made known to us merely by revelation, may be still farther removed beyond the reach of our faculties. At any rate, the knowledge of it is not necessary for the purposes of the revelation ; and, therefore, although so very little be revealed concerning them, as to leave impenetrable darkness over all the speculations by which men attempt to investigate the manner in which they are distinguished from one another, and the manner in which they are united, still their existence and their agency may be placed beyond doubt by explicit declarations, and the reliance upon these declarations may establish, on the firmest grounds, that hope which the revelation was meant to convey.

The state of the case, then, with regard to the difficulties of religion, is precisely this. We have, by reason, the means of acquiring that knowledge

which the original condition of our being required, but not that which our curiosity may desire ; and accordingly when we launch into questions and speculations of mere curiosity, our pride is rebuked, and we are reminded that “ we are of yesterday, and know nothing.” The Gospel, by the provision which it has made for the change in our original condition, has opened to us a state of things in many respects new, by which we perceive how very limited the range of our natural knowledge was. But this state of things is intimated, only in so far as the provision for our condition renders an intimation necessary ; and while all the facts of real importance to our comfort and hope are published with the most satisfying evidence, we are checked in our speculations concerning this new state of things, by the very scanty measure of light which is afforded us to guide them. This is a view of the extent of our knowledge not very flattering to our pride. But it may be favourable both to our happiness and to our improvement ; and if we are wise enough to cultivate the temper of mind which such a view is peculiarly calculated to form, we may derive much profit from the bounds which are set to our inquiries, as well as from the enlargement which is given to our hopes. There does arise, however, from this view of our knowledge, one most interesting and fundamental question, which is the subject of my third preliminary observation, What is the use of reason in matters of religion ?

Butler. Sherlock. Campbell.

CHAP. V.

USE OF REASON IN RELIGION.

IF the Christian religion contain many points which we do not fully comprehend, and if we be required to believe these points, a difficulty seems to arise with regard to the boundaries between reason and faith. This is a subject upon which it is of very great importance to form distinct apprehensions, before we proceed to a particular consideration of the doctrines of Christianity. When you study church history, you will find that this question has been agitated in various forms from the beginning of Christianity to this day. It is not my province to relate the progress of this dispute, or the different appearances which it has assumed. And, in truth, many of the controversies to which it has given occasion are insignificant, because when they are examined they appear to be purely verbal. Those, who said that reason was of no use in matters of religion, sometimes meant nothing more than that religion derived no benefit from that which is really the abuse of reason, false philosophy, and the jargon of metaphysics. The argument was kept up by the equivocation between reason and the abuse of reason; and had the disputants shown themselves willing to

understand one another by defining the terms which they used, it would have appeared that there was very little difference in their opinions.

But this account will not apply to all the controversies that have turned upon this question. The sublime incomprehensible nature of some of the Christian doctrines has so completely subdued the understanding of many pious men, as to make them think it presumptuous to apply reason any how to the revelation of God ; and the many instances, in which the simplicity of truth has been corrupted by an alliance with philosophy, confirm them in the belief that it is safer, as well as more respectful, to resign their minds to devout impressions, than to exercise their understandings in any speculations upon sacred subjects. Enthusiasts and fanatics of all different names and sects agree in decrying the use of reason, because it is the very essence of fanaticism to substitute, in place of the sober deductions of reason, the extravagant fancies of a disordered imagination, and to consider these fancies as the immediate illumination of the Spirit of God. Insidious writers in the deistical controversy have pretended to adopt those sentiments of humility and reverence, which are inseparable from true Christians, and even that total subjection of reason to faith which characterises enthusiasts. A pamphlet was published about the middle of the last century, that made a noise in its day, although it is now forgotten, entitled, *Christianity not Founded on Argument*, which, while to a careless reader it may seem to magnify the Gospel, does in reality tend to undermine our faith, by separating it from a rational assent ; and Mr. Hume, in the spirit of this pam-

phlet, concludes his *Essay on Miracles*, with calling those, dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. "Our most holy religion," he says, with a disingenuity very unbecoming his respectable talents, "is founded on faith, not on reason,"—and "mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity." The Church of Rome, in order to subject the minds of her votaries to her authority, has reprobated the use of reason in matters of religion. She has revived an ancient position, that things may be true in theology which are false in philosophy; and she has, in some instances, made the merit of faith to consist in the absurdity of that which was believed.

The extravagance of these positions has produced, since the Reformation, an opposite extreme. While those who deny the truth of revelation consider reason as in all respects a sufficient guide, the Socinians, who admit that a revelation has been made, employ reason as the supreme judge of its doctrines, and boldly strike out of their creed every article that is not altogether conformable to those notions which may be derived from the exercise of reason.

These controversies, concerning the use of reason in matters of religion, are disputes not about words, but about the essence of Christianity. They form a most interesting object of attention to a student in divinity, because they affect the whole course and direction of his studies; and yet, it appears to me that a few plain observations are sufficient to ascertain where the truth lies in this subject.

1. The first use of reason in matters of religion is to examine the evidences of revelation. For the more entire the submission which we consider as due to every thing that is revealed, we have the more need to be satisfied that any system which professes to be a divine revelation, does really come from God. It is plain from the review which we took of the evidences of Christianity, that very large provision is made for affording our minds a rational conviction, of its divine original; and the style of argument, which pervades the discourses of our Lord, and the sermons and the writings of his apostles, is a continued call upon us to exercise our reason in judging of that provision. I need not quote particular passages; for that man must have read the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles with a very careless or a very prejudiced eye, who does not feel the manner, in which our religion was proposed by its divine author and his immediate disciples, to be a clear refutation of the position which I mentioned lately, that Christianity is not founded on argument. You will recollect too, that all the different branches of the evidence of Christianity are ultimately resolvable into some principle of reason. The internal evidence of Christianity is only then perceived, when you try the system of the Gospel by a standard which you are supposed to have derived from natural religion. The argument which miracles and prophecies afford is but an inference from the power, wisdom, and holiness of God, all of which you assume as premises that are not disputed; and that complication of circumstances which constitutes the historical evidence for Christianity, derives its weight from those laws of proba-

bility which experience and reflection suggest as the guide of our judgment. It is not easy to conceive that a creature, who is accustomed to exercise his reason upon every other subject, should be required to lay it aside upon a subject so interesting as the evidences of religion; and it is plain, that to substitute as the ground of our faith certain impressions, the liveliness of which depends very much upon the state of the animal spirits, in place of the various exercises of reason which this subject calls forth, is to render that precarious and inexplicable which might rest upon sure principles, and to disregard the provision made by the author of our faith, who hath both commanded and enabled us to "be always ready to give an answer to every one that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us."

2. After the exercise of reason has established in our minds a firm belief that Christianity is of divine original, the second use of reason is to learn what are the truths revealed. As these truths are not in our days communicated to any by immediate inspiration, the knowledge of them is to be acquired only from books transmitted to us with satisfying evidence that they were written above seventeen hundred years ago, in a remote country, and a foreign language, under the direction of the Spirit of God. In order to attain the meaning of these books, we must study the language in which they were written, and we must study also the manners of the times, and the state of the countries in which the writers lived, because these are circumstances to which an original author is often alluding, and by which his phraseology is generally

affected : we must lay together different passages in which the same word or phrase occurs, because without this labour we cannot ascertain its precise signification ; and we must mark the difference of style and manner that characterizes different writers, because a right apprehension of their meaning often depends upon attention to this difference. All this supposes the application of grammar, history, geography, chronology, and criticism in matters of religion, *i. e.* it supposes that the reason of man had been previously exercised in pursuing these different branches of knowledge, and that our success in attaining the true sense of Scripture depends upon the diligence with which we avail ourselves of the progress that has been made in them. It is obvious that every Christian is not capable of making this application. But this is no argument against the use of reason of which we are now speaking. For they, who use translations and commentaries, only rely upon the reason of others, instead of exercising their own. The several branches of knowledge, which I mentioned, have been applied in every age by some persons for the benefit of others ; and the progress in sacred criticism, which distinguishes the present times, is nothing else but the continued application, in elucidating the Scriptures, of reason enlightened by every kind of subsidiary knowledge, and very much improved in this kind of exercise, by the employment which the ancient classics have given it since the revival of letters.

As the use of reason thus leads us into the meaning of the single words and phrases of Scripture, so it is equally necessary to enable us to attain a com-

prehensive view of the whole system of Scripture doctrine. Our Lord said to his apostles a little before his death, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." The Spirit guided them into all truth after the ascension of their master; and their discourses and epistles are the fruit of that perfect teaching, which they had not been able to receive during his life. The epistles of Paul to the different churches refer to points which he had explained to the Christians when he was with them, or to questions which had arisen amongst them after his departure. They mention rather incidentally than formally the great truths of the Gospel: and there is no passage in them which can be considered as a complete delineation of all that we are called to believe. Yet the apostles speak of "the form of sound words," of "the truth as it is in Jesus," of "the faith once delivered to the saints," for which Christians ought to contend. The knowledge of this form of sound words, this truth and faith, we are left to attain by searching the Scriptures, by comparing the discourses of our Lord, and the writings of his apostles, by employing expressions which are plain to illustrate those which are obscure, by giving such interpretations of the sacred writers as will preserve their consistency with themselves and with one another, by marking the consequences which are fairly deducible from their explicit declaration, and by framing, out of what is said and what is implied in their writings, a system that shall appear to be fully warranted by their authority. Without all this, we do not learn the revelation which is contained in the Gospel; and yet this implies some of the highest exercises of reason, sagacity, investigation, comparison, abstraction;

and it is the most important service which sound philosophy can render to Christianity, that it enables us by these exercises to attain a distinct and enlarged apprehension of the Gospel scheme in all its connexions and consequences. It is very true, that many pious Christians derive much consolation and improvement from the particular doctrines of Christianity, although the narrowness of their views, and the distraction of their thoughts, render it impossible for them to form a just and comprehensive view of the whole. But it is the professed object of those who propose to be teachers of Christianity to attain such a view. It is an object for which they are supposed to have leisure and opportunity; and unless they thus know the truth, they are not qualified to show that Christ is indeed "the power of God and the wisdom of God," or to defend the Gospel scheme against the objections, and rescue it from the abuses, to which a partial consideration has often given occasion.

3. After the two uses of reason that have been illustrated, a third comes to be mentioned, which may be considered as compounded of both. Reason is of eminent use in repelling the attacks of the adversaries of Christianity.

When men of erudition, of philosophical acuteness, and of accomplished taste, direct their talents against our religion, the cause is very much hurt by an unskilful defender. He cannot unravel their sophistry; he does not perceive the amount and the effect of the concessions which he makes to them; he is bewildered by their quotations, and he is often led by their artifice upon dangerous ground. In all ages of the church there have been weak defend-

ers of Christianity; and the only triumphs of the enemies of our religion have arisen from their being able to expose the defects of those methods of defending the truth, which some of its advocates had unwarily chosen. A mind, trained to accurate philosophical views of the nature and the amount of evidence, enriched with historical knowledge, accustomed to throw out of a subject all that is minute and unrelated, to collect what is of importance within a short compass, and to form the comprehension of a whole, is the mind qualified to contend with the learning, the wit, and the sophistry of infidelity. Many such minds have appeared in this honourable controversy during the course of this and the last century; and the success has corresponded to the completeness of the furniture with which they engaged in the combat. The Christian doctrine has been vindicated by their masterly exposition from various misrepresentations; the arguments for its divine original have been placed in their true light; and the attempts to confound the miracles and prophecies, upon which Christianity rests its claim, with the delusions of imposture, have been effectually repelled. Christianity has, in this way, received the most important advantages from the attacks of its enemies; and it is not improbable that its doctrines would never have been so thoroughly cleared from all the corruptions and subtleties which had attached to them in the progress of ages, nor the evidences of its truths have been so accurately understood, nor its peculiar character been so perfectly discriminated, had not the zeal and abilities, which have been employed against it, called forth in its defence some of the most distinguished masters of reason. They

brought into the service of Christianity the same weapons which had been drawn for her destruction, and, wielding them with confidence and skill in a good cause, became the successful champions of the truth.

I cannot speak of this third use of reason in matters of religion, without recommending to you an excellent book, in which you will find the advantage that Christianity has derived from it very fully illustrated. I mean *Dissertations on the genius and evidences of Christianity*, by Dr. Gerard, formerly Professor of Divinity in King's College, Aberdeen. All his works show Dr. Gerard to have been an acute distinguishing man. The observations in this book are very ingenious, and although there is in some of them an appearance of remoteness and research that is not perfectly agreeable, yet they are spread out at such length, and placed in so many different views, as to satisfy every reader not only that they are just, but that they add considerable weight to the collateral presumptive evidence of Christianity. The first part of the book is intended to show that the manner in which our Lord and his apostles proposed the evidences of Christianity was the most perfect. It is the second part which relates more directly to our present subject. Dr. Gerard entitled the second part, *Christianity confirmed by the opposition of Infidels*. He states the advantages which it derived from the opposition of early infidels, and then, with much useful reference to the present state of theological discussions, the advantages which it has derived from opposition in modern times, and the argument thence arising for its truth. The whole second part is the best illustration, that I can

point out, of the use of reason in repelling the attacks of the adversaries of Christianity.

But while many of the champions of Christianity have adorned and illustrated that truth which they defended, you will find that others, by a licentious use of reason, have mutilated the Christian doctrine, and reduced it to little more than a system of morality. And therefore it becomes necessary to speak,

4. Of the fourth use of reason in judging of the truths of religion. The principles upon this subject are so simple and clear, that I shall be able to state them in a few words ; and, although there has been very gross abuse of reason in judging of the truths of religion, it will not readily occur to you, how any person who understands the principles can fail essentially in the application of them. Every thing which is revealed by God comes to his creatures from so high an authority, that it may be rested in with perfect assurance as true. Nothing can be received by us as true which is contrary to the dictates of reason, because it is impossible for us to perceive at the same time the truth and the falsehood of a proposition. But many things are true which we do not fully comprehend, and many propositions, which appear incredible when they are first enunciated, are found, upon examination, such as our understanding can readily admit. These principles appear to me to embrace the whole of the subject, and they mark out the steps by which reason is to proceed in judging of the truths of religion. We first examine the evidences of revelation. If these satisfy our understandings, we are certain that there can be no contradiction between the doctrines

of this true religion, and the dictates of right reason. If any such contradiction appear, there must be some mistake: by not making a proper use of our reason in the interpretation of the Gospel, we suppose that it contains doctrines which it does not teach: or, we give the name of right reason to some narrow prejudices which deeper reflection and more enlarged knowledge will dissipate; or, we consider a proposition as implying a contradiction, when, in truth, it is only imperfectly understood. Here, as in every other case, mistakes are to be corrected by measuring back our steps. We must examine closely and impartially the meaning of those passages which appear to contain the doctrine: we must compare them with one another: we must endeavour to derive light from the general phrascology of Scripture and the analogy of faith; and we shall generally be able, in this way, to separate the doctrine from all those adventitious circumstances which give it the appearance of absurdity. If a doctrine, which, upon the closest examination, appears unquestionably to be taught in Scripture, still does not approve itself to our understanding, we must consider carefully what it is that prevents us from receiving it. There may be preconceived notions hastily taken up which that doctrine opposes; there may be pride of understanding that does not readily submit to the views which it communicates; or reason may need to be reminded, that we must expect to find in religion many things which we are not able to comprehend. One of the most important offices of reason is to recognise her own limits. She never can be moved by any authority to receive as true what she perceives to be absurd. But if she has formed a just estimate

of the measure of human knowledge, she will not shelter her presumption in rejecting the truths of revelation under the pretence of contradictions that do not really exist; she will readily admit that there may be in a subject some points which she knows, and others of which she is ignorant; she will not allow her ignorance of the latter to shake the evidence of the former; but will yield a firm assent to that which she does understand, without presuming to deny what is beyond her comprehension. And thus availing herself of all the light which she now has, she will wait in humble hope for the time when a larger measure shall be imparted.

The importance, and indeed the meaning, of the principles which I have stated, would be best understood by examples. But were I to attempt to exemplify them, I should anticipate the subjects upon which we are to enter. These principles will often recur in the progress of my Lectures upon the particular doctrines of Christianity; and therefore I shall content myself with having stated them in this general manner at present.

A right apprehension of this fourth use of reason in matters of religion constitutes the defence of Christianity against a large class of objections, that are often urged against some of its peculiar doctrines. You will find it therefore occasionally stated in all the writers who treat of these doctrines, and if there is a proper selection of your reading, just views upon this important subject will become familiar to your minds at the same time that you are studying the Scripture system. The best preparation for these views is sound logic, which, in teaching the

right use of reason, ascertains its boundaries, and guards against the abuse of it. You bring that furniture with you when you enter upon the study of divinity. You improve it during the prosecution of that study, by reading Bacon, Locke, and Reid, and the other writers who treat of the intellectual powers, and by all those exercises, which render your own intellectual powers more sound and more acute, which increase their vigour, while they check their presumption. I would recommend to you particularly to read and study upon this subject, Reid's Essay on the Intellectual Powers, and five chapters of the 4th book of Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, which treat of assent, reason, faith and reason, enthusiasm, wrong assent and error. They contain a most rational, and I think, when properly understood, a just view of reason in judging of the truths of religion; and every student ought to be well acquainted with them.

Potter, *Prælectiones Theologicæ*, vol. iii.
Randolph.

CHAP. VI.

CONTROVERSIES OCCASIONED BY THE SCRIPTURE
SYSTEM.

THE last preliminary observation arising out of the general view of the Scripture system respects the controversies, to which that system has given occasion. Even those, who agreed as to the divine authority of the Christian religion, have differed very widely in their interpretation of its doctrines. These differences have not been confined to trifling matters, but have often touched upon points which are said to concern the very essence of the religion, and they, who held the opposite opinions, have discovered a mutual contempt and bitterness, very inconsistent with the spirit which might be supposed to animate the disciples of the same Master.

When we endeavour to account for the controversies in religion, we must begin with recollecting that there is hardly any subject of speculation, upon which those by whom it has been thoroughly canvassed have not differed in opinion. The degrees of understanding, and the opportunities of improvement are so various, and there is such variety in the circumstances and connexions which direct men to

their first opinions, and which insensibly warp their judgment, that the same subject is seldom viewed by two persons exactly in the same light. Minuter shades of difference are generally overlooked by those who agree in important points. But there are opinions so far removed from one another, that no explication of terms, no concessions which either side can make in consistency with their own principle, are sufficient to reconcile them. Hence the different systems which have been framed, and zealously maintained with regard to several branches of natural theology and pneumatics, with regard to the principles of morality, with regard to politics, I do not mean the politics of the day, but the general science of politics, and with regard to various questions in natural philosophy. Any person, who is conversant with the writings of the ancient and modern philosophers, knows that without opposition of interest, merely from a difference in the mode of exercising the understanding upon subjects which appear to be within the reach of the human powers, controversies have been agitated ever since men began to speculate, and, after receiving the fullest discussion, have revived in a new form with fresh vigour.

But, notwithstanding this multiplicity of controversies, which the love of disputation has produced upon all other subjects, it may occur to you, that the authority, with which a messenger of heaven speaks, should put an end to all dispute with regard to the subjects of his mission, amongst those who acknowledge that he comes from God. You consider it as essential to a divine revelation, that all which is necessary to be known should there be deliv-

ered in explicit terms, and you think it impossible that any Christian should deny those propositions which are clearly contained in Scripture. A little attention, however, to the circumstances of the case, will enable you to reconcile the existence of theological controversy with these principles.

The different parts of my discourse upon this subject are, from their nature, so blended together, that I shall not attempt to keep them asunder by separate heads. But the points to which I am to call your attention, as serving to account for the multiplicity of theological controversies, are these—the manner in which the truths of the Gospel are to be learned,—the nature and importance of these truths—the sentiments and passions, which, from the weakness of humanity, frequently operated in the breasts of persons who speculated concerning them—and the genius of that philosophy in which many of those persons were educated.

The truths of the Gospel must be deduced from an interpretation of the words of Scripture ; and this interpretation admits of variety, according to the measure in which those who profess to interpret are acquainted with the language, the manners, and the phraseology of the writers, according to the attention which they bestow, and the honesty of mind with which they receive the truth. In the plainest language that can be used, there are metaphorical expressions which some may stretch too far, and others may consider as not admitting of any direct application to the subject. In every discourse extending to a considerable length, there are limitations of general expressions arising out of the occasion upon which they are used, that may be over-

looked, or that may be perverted ; and with regard to the Gospel in particular, there are pre-conceived opinions, which, by bending every proposition to a conformity with themselves, may lead men far from the truth, without their being conscious of showing any contempt to the authority of the revelation. These causes have operated even with regard to the meaning of the precepts of the Gospel, and have produced that casuistical morality, which, while it acknowledges Scripture as the standard of practice, has abounded in controversies concerning the application of that standard to particular cases.

But the controversies, with which you are chiefly concerned, respect not so much the practical parts of our religion as its doctrines ; and you will not be surprised at the multiplicity of these, when you recollect the imperfect measure in which the Gospel has opened to the human mind new, interesting, and profound subjects of speculation. We found formerly, that, while the Gospel brings the most convincing evidence of the great facts in natural theology, it leaves all the intricate questions which have occurred concerning these facts just where they were ; and that, while by revealing a new dispensation of Providence it necessarily mentioned the existence of persons not known by the religion of nature, their relation to us, and the conduct of that scheme in which they are engaged for our benefit, it has communicated only such information, with regard to this new set of facts that are to be received upon the authority of revelation, as is of real importance, leaving many points in darkness. Here is the most fruitful subject of controversy that can be conceived. The propositions revealed in Scrip-

ture are so few and simple, that it is hardly possible for those who rest in Scripture to disagree. But the pride of human wisdom does not readily submit to be confined within bounds so narrow. Those, who have been accustomed to speculate upon other subjects, continue their speculations upon religion, and, forgetting the proper province of reason with regard to truths that are revealed, which is to receive with humility what does not appear upon examination to be absurd, they reject as unimportant every thing that reason did not investigate; or they endeavour, by means of reason, to carry their explanations and discoveries far beyond the measure of light contained in the Scripture; or they embarrass, by the terms and distinctions of human science, subjects so imperfectly revealed as not to admit of them. It cannot be expected that there should be uniformity in employments such as these, which do not proceed upon certain principles, and do not admit of being reduced to any fixed rule. When men of different modes of education, and different habits of thinking, undervaluing the simplicity of the facts revealed in Scripture, and desirous to be wise above what is written, carry their inquiries into the manner of these facts, they set out from different points, they wander without a guide in a boundless field of conjecture, and, having assumed their premises at pleasure, they arrive at opposite conclusions.

Even in the days of the apostles, "the form of sound words" which they delivered was complicated, and disguised by the prejudices of those who embraced it. The Jewish converts, retaining an implicit veneration for the teachers of the law, wished to incorporate with the Christian faith all the fables

which they found in the writings of their Rabbins ; and many of the heathen converts proceeded to canvass the subjects of revelation, with the presumptuous and inquisitive spirit of the philosophy which they had learned. Hence you read in the Epistles of Paul of “ foolish and unlearned questions which gender strife ;” of teachers “ who, concerning the truth had erred, and overthrew the faith of some ;” of “ fables and endless genealogies ;” and of “ oppositions of science, falsely so called.” We learn from Peter that the unlearned and unstable wrested some things in Paul’s Epistles that are hard to be understood, and the other Scriptures also, to their own destruction : and it is a tradition from the earliest Christian writers, that John wrote both his first Epistle and his Gospel with a view to combat a heresy concerning our Lord’s person, which attachment to the oriental philosophy had introduced amongst the first Christians. If controversy thus found a place in the church even under the eye of the apostles, and was not effectually repressed by their explanation of their own words, and by their authority, you may expect that it would multiply fast after their departure, when the only standard of faith was the written word, and no person was entitled to impose his interpretation of that word as the true mind of the apostles. The same presumptuous curiosity, which had appeared in the earliest times, continued to extend to all the parts of Christian doctrine. Men speculated concerning the manner in which the Son and the Spirit exist with the Father. Instead of judging of the evidences of the divine mission of Jesus, they proceeded to scan the reasons of that dispensation which they were requir-

ed to believe. They investigated the principles upon which the several parts of the dispensation combine in producing the end, and they pretended to ascertain the nature and the manner of their operation. They spread out the scanty information which Scripture affords upon all these subjects into large systems. But the original materials being very few, and the rest being supplied by imagination and false philosophy, the systems differed widely from one another, and it was impossible to find any method of reconciling the difference.

You will not suppose that these discussions proceeded in every instance purely from a desire of attaining the truth, or that they were conducted with the calm disinterested spirit which becomes a lover of knowledge. Any person, who has that acquaintance with human nature which history and experience afford, will not be surprised to find that other passions often mingled their influence with the pride of reason. Jealousy of a rival produced opposition to his opinions, so that some systems of theology grew out of a private quarrel. The vices of an individual needed some shelter, and he tried to find it in the zeal and ingenuity with which he brought forward speculations upon some of the points that were then universally interesting. The love of power induced some to stand forth as the leaders in theological controversy, whilst meaner desires dictated to others the station which they were to assume, and the humble offices by which they were to maintain the combat. Matters of order, ceremonies of worship, and all those usages in Christian societies, which the word of God has left as matters of indifference to be regulated by human prudence, were

laid hold of by artful men who knew that they were of no essential importance, and placed in such a light as to be the most effectual means of inflaming the minds of the multitude. Some of the earliest and most violent controversies respected the time of celebrating Easter; and the history of the church abounds with others equally insignificant. By this mixture of more ignoble principles with the presumptuous curiosity that pried into those "secret things which belong to the Lord," theological subjects became one field for exhibiting the angry passions, which from the beginning of the world have disturbed the peace of society. Had that field been wanting, men would have found other pretexts for acting, from jealousy, ambition, and avarice; and many of the controversies of the Christian Church are, in one respect, a proof of that depravity of human nature, which, notwithstanding the remedy brought by the Gospel, continued to operate in the breasts of those who professed to receive that religion.

The number and intricacy of theological controversies were very much increased by the philosophy of the times. In the second century the philosophy of Plato was held in the highest admiration, and some of the learned Christians, having been educated in the schools of the later Platonists, retained the sentiments, and even the dress of philosophers, after they became the disciples of Christ. In the third century, Origen, who by the extent of his erudition, the intenseness of his application, and the vigour of his genius, was qualified to lead the minds not of his contemporaries only, but of succeeding ages, was a

professed Platonist. In his theological system, he accommodates the whole scheme of Christian doctrine to the leading principles of Platonism; and in his interpretation of the Scriptures, he adopts that allegorical and mystical method of exposition, to which the luxuriant fancy, and the sublime imagery of the Athenian philosopher had given occasion, and the Platonic father was thus able to bring out of the simplicity of the Scriptures all the profound speculations which he wished to find there. Origen is generally regarded as the father of scholastic theology, which derives its name from applying the terms and distinctions of human science to the truths of revelation. Scholastic theology assumed different forms, corresponding to the succession of particular systems of philosophy. But during the whole period of its existence, it maintained this general character, that it altered and corrupted the divine simplicity of the Gospel, and that by affecting metaphysical precision upon subjects which the Scriptures have left undefined, it was productive of endless controversies. The progress of these controversies, which rendered it necessary for the opposite parties to entrench their opinions behind definitions, divisions, and terms of art, recommended to theologians the philosophy of Aristotle. The subtile distinguishing genius of Aristotle had invented a language peculiarly fitted to convey the discriminating tenets of their systems, and his authority had introduced and established the syllogistical mode of reasoning, a mode of no avail in making discovery, but of singular use in disputation, because it furnishes a kind of defensive weapons, which, by keeping an opponent at a distance, may, when skilfully managed, render it im-

possible for him to gain a victory. For these reasons, as well as for others, which it is not my province to explain, the Platonic philosophy yielded after a few centuries to the Peripatetic. The authority of Aristotle became as complete in the schools of theology as in those of logic or metaphysics; and all theological systems abounded so much with the barbarous jargon then in use, that we cannot at this day understand the opinions which were held upon intricate points of divinity without attempting to learn it. Upon all subjects this language served to conceal ignorance under an ostentatious parade of words. But when it is applied to those subjects which the wisdom of God hath seen meet to reveal in very imperfect measure, the number of clear ideas bears so very small a proportion to the multitude of words, that the study of it forms a very unprofitable waste of time; for it requires much labour to apprehend the meaning, and, unless your mind be so unhappily constituted, as to remember words better than things, the meaning escapes almost as soon as it is attained.

Since the era of the Reformation, the Aristotelian philosophy has been gradually sinking in the public esteem; and the human mind, having broken the fetters in which she had long been bound, has freely canvassed all subjects connected with religion. While the ablest writers have appeared during the two last centuries in the deistical controversy, all the other controversies relating both to the doctrine, and to the rites or discipline of the Christian church, have called forth men of profound erudition and of philosophical minds. The same causes which we formerly mentioned, have produced in modern times

a difference of opinion, both with regard to those intricate questions in natural theology which the Gospel has not solved, and with regard to those new points, concerning which the information given in Scripture is by no means satisfying to the curiosity of man. A more rational criticism, than that used in ancient times, has been applied to the interpretation of Scripture. A more enlightened philosophy, a sounder logic, and a language less technical, but not deficient in precision, have been employed in supporting the different theological opinions which former habits of thinking, or the interpretation of Scripture, have led men to adopt. The most controverted points have been the subject of public national disputes, as well as of private inquiry. Churches are discriminated from one another by the system upon those points which enters into their creed ; and individual members of every church, with that boldness of inquiry of which the Reformation set the example, have carried their researches into many points which most creeds had left undefined. The consequence of this thorough examination of the Scripture system has been, not that all the parts of it are understood, but that the measure in which they can be understood is known ; every unnecessary degree of obscurity which had been attached to them is removed, and the limits of reason in judging of religion, together with the proper method of its being applied to that subject, are ascertained. The opponents in these controversies have corrected the errors of one another. The appeals which have been constantly made to Scripture, the diligence with which all the passages relating to every subject have been collected, and the ingenuity with which they

have been applied in support of different systems, enable an impartial inquirer to attain the true meaning: and a student of divinity must be very much wanting to himself, if, after all the labours of those who have gone before him, he does not acquire a distinct notion of the various opinions that have been entertained concerning the several parts of the Scripture system, and an apprehension of the train of argument by which every one of them is supported.

A review of the controversies forms a principal part of a course of theological lectures. We do not bring forward to the people all the variety of opinions which have been held by presumptuous inquirers, or superficial reasoners. To men who have not leisure to speculate upon religion, and who require the united force of all its doctrines to promote those practical purposes, which are of more essential importance than any other, it is much better to present "the form of sound words," as it was "once delivered to the saints," unembarrassed by human distinctions and oppositions of science, and to imprint upon their minds the consolation and "instruction in righteousness," which, when thus stated, it is well fitted to administer. This is the business of preaching. But this is not the only business of students in divinity. You are not masters of your profession, you are not qualified to defend the truth against the multiplicity of error, and your conceptions of the system of theology have not that enlargement and accuracy which they might have, unless you study the controverted points of divinity. It is true that there have been many disputes merely verbal; that there have been others that cannot

be called verbal, the matter of which is wholly unimportant; and that perhaps all have been conducted with a degree of acrimony which the principles of Christian toleration, when thoroughly understood, will enable you to avoid. These general remarks will find their proper place, after reviewing the particular controversies. But in that review you will meet with many which turn upon points so essential to the Christian faith, where the arguments upon both sides appear to have so much force, and have been urged in a manner so able, and so well fitted to enlighten the mind, that you will think it childish to affect to despise theological controversies in general, because there has been some impropriety in the manner of their being conducted, or because some of them are insignificant.

The time was when the decision of all theological controversies turned upon a kind of traditional authority. The writers in the first four centuries of the Christian church were supposed to be much better acquainted with the mind of the apostles, and to have been in a more favourable situation for knowing the truth upon all difficult questions, than those who apply to the study of theology in later times. They were dignified with the name of the fathers. Their opinions were resorted to with a kind of reverence, which is not due to any human compositions. They were considered as the only sure interpreters of Scripture; and such confidence was reposed in their interpretation, that their works were sometimes placed very nearly upon a level with the inspired writings. The charm of human authority was dispelled by the Reformation. An accurate enlightened criticism has appreciated the merit of the

Christian fathers. We allow them all the credit, which is due to honest men attesting facts that came within their own knowledge. We venerate their antiquity ; we prize that knowledge of the early rites of the Christian church, and of the tradition of doctrine from the days of the apostles, which can be derived only from them. Above all, we consider their writings as an inestimable treasure upon this account, that by their mention of the books of the New Testament, and by the quotations from Scripture with which they abound, they are to us the vouchers of the authenticity of the sacred books, and of the manner in which the canon of Scripture was completed. But our sense of their merit, and of their importance to the Christian faith in the character of historians, does not induce us to submit to them as teachers. Without any invidious detraction, with every indulgence which the manners of the times and the imperfection of other early writers demand for the Christian fathers, Protestants adhere to their leading principle, which is this, to consider the Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith. They have learned to call no man their master, because one is their Master, even Christ : and in interpreting the words of Christ and his apostles, they consider themselves as no less entitled to judge for themselves, and as, in some respects, no less qualified to form a sound judgment, than those who, living in earlier times, had prejudices and disadvantages from which we may be exempt. I cannot express this principle better than in the words of our Confession of Faith : “ The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers,

doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture."

This is the principle to be followed in that review of the great controversies of religion, which forms a prominent subject of my lectures. I may often give you, from ancient writers, the history of opinions, and may occasionally combat those misrepresentations of that history which are found in modern authors, eager to call in every aid to support their particular systems. But I shall quote the Christian fathers as historians, not as authorities. I know no authority upon which you ought to rest in judging of the truth of any doctrine but the Scriptures, and therefore I consider sacred criticism as the most important branch of the study of theology. We are to avail ourselves of an intimate acquaintance with the language of the New Testament, *i. e.* with the meaning of single words, with the usual acceptation of phrases, and with the real amount of figurative expression. We are to study the general customs of the people amongst whom that language was used, and the habits of thinking which might dictate a particular phraseology to some writers. We are to investigate the mind of an author, by comparing his language in one place with that which occurs in another, and we are to endeavour to attain a full and precise conception of the whole doctrine of Scripture upon every point, by laying together those passages of Scripture in which it is stated under different views.

It is by this patient exercise of reason and criticism that a student of divinity is emancipated from

all subjection to the opinions of men, and led most certainly into the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. It is the great object of my lectures, to assist you in this exercise, and I may hope, after having bestowed much pains in going before you, to be of some use in abridging your labour, by pointing out the shortest and most successful method of arriving at the conclusion. I shall not decline giving my opinion upon the passages which I quote, and the comparison of Scripture which I shall often make. But I do not desire you to pay more regard to my opinions than to those of any other writer, unless in so far as they appear to you upon examination to be well founded. You will derive more benefit from canvassing what I say than from imbibing all that I can teach; and the most useful lessons which you can learn from me are a habit of attention, a love of truth, and a spirit of inquiry.

CHAP. VII.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE COURSE.

OUR Shorter Catechism, and our Confession of Faith, are formed upon the course in which systems of divinity commonly proceed, and both of them are clear and well digested. You will find another excellent abridgment of the ordinary course in Marckii Medulla Theologiæ, a duodecimo of 300 pages, which used to be the text book in St. Mary's College, and which, in my opinion, ought to be read by every student of divinity, not early, but before he finishes his studies. You will see in this little book all the controversies that have been agitated. But you will see them in the order of the system, and the order is this. After a general account of the nature of theology, and of the Scriptures as the principle of theology, the following subjects succeed one another. God and the Trinity—the decrees of God—the execution of these decrees in the works of Creation—a view of the visible and invisible world—the Providence and government which God exercises over his works—man—the state of innocence—the fall—the consequences of sin—the covenant of grace—the person, offices, and state of the Mediator of the cove-

nant—the benefits of the covenant—the duties of those who partake of the benefits—the sacraments—the Church—the final condition of mankind.

Upon all these subjects, the orthodox doctrine is stated, and the objections that have been made to the several parts of the doctrine are answered, so that every chapter contains an account of the several opinions, that have been held upon all the points that occur in the chapter. I was afraid to entangle myself in this course, partly from an apprehension, proceeding both upon the number of subjects which it embraces, and upon the experience of other professors of divinity who have engaged in it, that it was likely to stretch out to such a length, as to leave me no hope of finishing my lectures during the longest term of attendance which the law prescribes to students; and partly from an opinion that the arrangement adopted in the ordinary course is not the most perfect. You will not think this opinion ill founded, when you come to read Marckii Medulla; for there, and I believe, in every other of the common systems, there is so close an alliance between the subjects treated under the different heads, that the same principles are frequently resorted to in order to illustrate the orthodox doctrine; objections, the same in substance with those that had been answered in a former chapter, recur under a different form, and the same answers are repeated with only a little variation in the manner of applying them. I am very far from condemning this arrangement as in all respects improper. It was adopted by very able men; it is most useful for giving a thorough acquaintance with all the parts of the Scripture system; and there is one book in which it appears to

such advantage, that what I account its imperfection is almost forgotten, I mean Calvin's Institutes of the Christian religion ; a book written in Latin, that is not only perspicuous, but elegant, and giving a most masterly comprehensive view of the great points in theology. It consists of four books. The first is entitled, *De Cognitione Dei Creatoris*. The second, *De Cognitione Dei Redemptoris*. The third, *De Modo Percipiendæ Christi gratiæ, et qui fructus inde nobis proveniant, et qui effectus consequantur*. The fourth, *De Externis Mediis ad Salutem*. It requires much time to read this book carefully ; but when a student has leisure to make it his business, he will find his labour abundantly recompensed ; and I do not know a more useful book for a clergyman in the country. It may be purchased for a trifle, and it is the best body of divinity. But excellent and profitable as this book is, the imperfection which I mentioned adheres to the plan upon which it is composed ; and although the order of Calvin's Institutes appears to me simpler and more natural than that of any other system which I have read, yet I think that, if I were to attempt to follow it, I should be reminded by frequent repetitions, that a more perfect arrangement might have rendered the course shorter and less fatiguing.

This impression led me to attend to another arrangement of the controversies, which has been executed with much ability by some theological writers. Every controversy is stated by itself ; *i. e.* all the distinguishing opinions of those, who derive a particular name from the peculiarity of their tenets, are brought into one view, and are referred to one general principle, so that you see the system of their

creed, and can mark the connexion between the several parts. To give an example : Socinianism is the system of those who hold the opinions of Socinus. The principle of Socinianism is, that man may be saved by that religion, which is founded upon the relation between God the Creator, and man his creature. From this principle flow their opinions with regard to the intention of Christ's death as a witness to the truth, and an example to his followers, but not as an atonement for sin ; their exclusion of mysteries from religion ; and all those tenets by which they transform the Christian religion into the most perfect system of morality. The principle of Pelagianism, or of those who hold the opinions of Pelagius, is this, that the natural powers of man since the fall are sufficient to enable him to keep the law of God. From this principle flow the opinions of the Pelagians concerning original sin, the decrees of God, the influences of the Spirit, and the measure of perfection which may be attained upon earth.

This method of arranging the controversies is manifestly much more scientific than the former. In every set of opinions which deserves the name of a system, there are some leading principles which connect the several parts. It is an agreeable exercise of the understanding to trace these principles, and to mark that kind of unity and subordination which arises from their influence. It is an act of justice in those who examine the opinions of others, to take into view that mutual dependence which renders them a consistent whole ; and it is an endless unavailing task to attempt to defend the truth against a multitude of detached errors, unless your reasoning reach the sources from which these errors

proceed. I recommend it, therefore, to those students who, in the course of their reading, have attained an intimate acquaintance both with the evidences of Christianity and with the particular doctrines of our faith, to study the most important controversies in this scientific manner. You will derive much assistance in this branch of your researches from Mosheim's Church History, which is an invaluable treasure of theological knowledge. This most learned and ingenious author, who, when read along with the able and judicious notes of his translator Maclaine, is in almost every instance a safe guide, has given, in one division of his work, a summary of all the heresies or particular opinions that were held in the different ages of the church. He has traced their rise and their progress, and has discriminated, with critical acumen, those which appear to an ordinary eye almost the same. As his work, from its nature, makes mention of all the controversies, both those which are important and those which are trifling, you cannot expect that even the opinions upon which he has judged it proper to bestow the most particular attention, will be fully elucidated in a book which comprehends such an extent of time, and such a variety of matter. You will supply this unavoidable defect by the books which Mosheim quotes in his notes, or which I recommend : and from the general index which he furnishes, and the treatises which professedly explain the particular subjects, you will be able to form a distinct connected view of every one of the five controversies which are universally interesting, and which are commonly known by the names of Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism, Arminianism, and the Popish controversy.

There are many other controversies that turn upon very important points. But they have not been so perfectly digested into the form of a system as the five now mentioned, nor have they been defended with such ability as to occupy a great part of the attention of a student.

Although I thus earnestly recommend attention to the scientific arrangement of the controversies, I have been restrained from adopting it as the plan of my course by the following reasons. Some of the five great controversies resemble one another in several points. Thus Pelagianism and Arminianism both turn upon the natural powers which man has, since the fall, to obey the will of God. Socinianism agrees with Pelagianism upon this point, and it agrees with Arianism in denying that Jesus is truly God, while it differs from Arianism in the account which it gives of his person. You may judge from this specimen, that although the scientific method, which I mentioned, is unquestionably the best for making you acquainted with any particular system of opinions, yet to us, who mean to review all the most important controverted points, it would necessarily be attended with much repetition. We should often meet, under different names, with the same objections, and the same heretical opinions, and we should be obliged to bring forward the same arguments and the same passages of Scripture in answer to them. Further, our object is not so much to know who held the particular opinions, and what was the age in which they lived; but what were the various opinions upon the great subjects of theology, and what were the grounds upon which they rested. We may attain this object, although we confound

the shades of difference between systems that nearly approach, and therefore to us it were a needless waste of research and of time to discriminate them nicely. Further still, as every one of the five great controversies embraces particular opinions upon many different points, the arranging the five separately breaks the subjects of theology into parts, and does not afford a full united view of any one subject. You will understand what I mean from an example. Besides the opinions of the early ages concerning the person of Christ, one opinion was held in the third century by Arius, another at a much later period by Socinus, and a third has been the general doctrine of the Christian church. Any one who wishes to make himself master of this interesting subject will desire to see the different opinions brought together, that he may compare their probability, that he may judge of the support which every one of them receives from particular passages of Scripture, or from the analogy of faith, and may thus attain a conclusion which he can defend by good reasons. Had you a book continually by you, in which all the controversies were arranged singly, you might make a collation of the different opinions upon the same subject, by reading first a part of Arianism, then the corresponding part of Socinianism, and next the corresponding part of that system which is called Orthodox, in the same manner as you get a full view of a siege in the Peloponnesian war, by passing directly from the portion of the siege which is written in one book of the history of Thucydides, to the portion of the same siege which is written in another book. But you could not make this collation in hearing a course of lectures, unless I repeated under one controversy as much of

what I had said under the corresponding part of another, as to bring it to your mind ; and this repetition would be a proof that the arrangement, however favourable to your understanding any one system of opinions, is unfavourable to your understanding the whole controverted subject.

Once more, there is in the different opinions upon the same subject a progress that may be traced, by which you see how one paved the way for the other ; and the succeeding opinion is often illustrated by the preparation which had been made for its reception. This advantage is lost, when you throw together the different subjects that were agitated in one system of opinions. You see, in this way, the chain which binds together all the parts of Pelagianism, Arminianism, or Socinianism. But in passing along the chain, you miss the thread which conducts you from the opinions on a particular subject found under one system, to the opinions on the same subject found under another.

For these reasons, I resolved neither to follow the path of the ordinary systems of theology, nor to adopt the more scientific mode of classing the opinions that distinguish different sects of Christians. The plan of my course is this :

Out of the mass of matter that is found in the system, I select the great subjects which have agitated and divided the minds of those who profess to build their faith upon the same Scriptures. I consider every one of these subjects separately ; I present the whole train and progress of opinions that have been held concerning it ; and I state the grounds upon which they rest, passing slightly over those opinions which are now forgotten, or whose

extravagance prevents any danger of their being revived, and dwelling upon those whose plausibility gave them at any time a general possession of the minds of men, or which still retain their influence and credit amongst some denominations of Christians.

In selecting the great subjects to be thus brought forward, I was guided by that general view of the Gospel which was formerly illustrated. We found its distinguishing character to be the religion of sinners,—a remedy for the present state of moral evil, provided by the love of God the Father, brought into the world by Jesus Christ, and applied by the influences of the Spirit. All the controversies which are scattered through the ordinary systems, and which have been classed under the different heads, Arianism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, respect either the Persons by whom the remedy is brought and applied, or the remedy itself. The different opinions respecting the Persons comprehend the whole of the Arian, a part of the Socinian, and all that is commonly called the Trinitarian controversy, upon which so much has been written since the beginning of the last century. The different opinions concerning the remedy itself respect either the nature of the remedy, the extent of the remedy, or the application of it; and they comprehend the whole system of Pelagian and Arminian principles, a part of the Socinian, and many of the doctrines of Popery. Opinions as to the nature of the remedy depend upon the apprehensions entertained of the nature of the disease; so that all the questions concerning original sin, the demerit of sin, and the manner in which guilt can be expiated, fall under this head. Opinions as to the extent of the remedy

embrace the questions concerning universal and particular redemption, and concerning the decrees of God. Opinions as to the application of the remedy turn upon the necessity of divine assistance, the manner in which it is bestowed and received, and the effects which it produces upon the mind and the conduct of those to whom it is given.

It appears to me, therefore, that by this distribution we do not omit any of the great controversies, with which students of divinity ought to be acquainted; at the same time, by tracing with undistracted attention the progress of opinions upon every subject, by viewing their points of opposition, and examining their respective merits, we consider one subject closely upon all sides before we proceed to another, and are thus saved the necessity of returning at any future period upon the ground which we had formerly trodden. Much light will probably be struck from this collision of different opinions. You have experience that you are never so thoroughly acquainted with a subject, as when you have heard the discussion of the several questions to which it gives rise, either in conversation, or in more formal debate; and therefore you have reason to expect that your knowledge of theology will be rendered much more accurate and profound, by canvassing the different opinions held in a succession of ages by very able men, and defended by them with a zeal that cannot be supposed to have omitted any argument, because it was dictated not merely by the love of truth, but in many instances by the desire of victory.

After I have derived all the benefit which the labours of these men can afford, in opening to you

those doctrines of Christianity which are the great subject of your studies, I next consider the church of Christ as a society founded by its Author. This branch of our course entered into the general view of the Scripture system; and it demands your particular attention, not only from the mention made of it in Scripture, but also from the many violent controversies to which it has given birth. The notion of a society implies the use of certain external observances, which are necessary to distinguish it from other societies, and to maintain order amongst the members. It is natural, therefore, in speaking of the Christian society, to give a history of church government, or an account of the various practices and questions which have occurred upon this head; and in this account I am led to investigate the grounds of that claim advanced by the Bishop of Rome, as the Head of the church, and the Vicar of Christ upon earth. There are many of the doctrines of the church of Rome, which fall under some of the controversies that we propose to review. But these doctrines were only called in as auxiliaries of the hierarchy, to lend their aid in supporting that system of spiritual power, of which the claim made by the Bishop of Rome was the principal pillar; so that by much the greater part of the Popish controversy belongs to the head of church government.

It is impossible, in this country, to consider Church government without bestowing attention upon the claims of Episcopacy and Presbytery. After examining the support which they derive from the word of God, and from the practice of antiquity, the transition is natural to the constitution of that Church, of which you expect to become

members. The Church of Scotland, like every other established Church, requires her office-bearers to subscribe a declaration of their faith. It is proper, therefore, to consider the right upon which such requisition rests, and the propriety of that right being exercised. The peculiar doctrines contained in that declaration, which we call the Confession of Faith, will have passed in review before we come to this part of our course. But it will be proper that you then attend to the reason of the peculiarities of that worship, in which you may soon be called to preside, and to the principles of that discipline and government, of which you may soon be called to be the guardians and the administrators.

The different parts of the office of a parish minister are familiar to those who live in this country, where they are not neglected. But some observations, with regard to the importance of performing them properly, and the manner in which they may be rendered most useful, will not appear unseasonable to those who are about to enter upon the office of the ministry ; and there is one branch of that office, I mean the preparation and the delivery of sermons, concerning which, after all that you have heard of composition elsewhere, you will naturally expect some practical rules in a place where your own discourses, the legal specimen of your proficiency in the study of theology, are exhibited and judged.

When I have filled up this plan to my own satisfaction, I shall think that I discharge that part of the public duties of my station which consists in lecturing, by contributing the whole stock of my information and experience for your advantage. My

principle is, to condense the execution of the plan as much as possible. I shall be disappointed, if I be not able to comprise my whole course in such a period as will give to every residing student of divinity an opportunity, if he chooses, of hearing all the parts of it; and I shall think it an advantage, if, by omitting some parts, and abridging others, I can so reduce the course, as to admit of passing over it twice, in the time prescribed for regular attendance at college.

Turretin, abridged by Russenius, is a very useful book for giving a short view of all the controverted points.

Stapferi Instit. Theol. Polemicæ, in 5 vol. is a valuable work. The different systems of opinions concerning the truths of religion are there separately arranged.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

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